George's Wild
ANIMAL
KINGDOM

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Credits and References to George Orwell’s Animal Farm, 2019’s The Lion King, The Lion King (Musical), and AvatarCat09’s The Lion King Novel

Chapter 1

This is me, George Boggs. Please rise up for the anthem for our animal theme park, the tune of Beethoven's 9th symphony.

Beasts of North America, Beasts of South America,
Beasts of every land and clime,
Hearken to my joyful tidings
Of the Golden future time.
Soon or late the day is coming,
Tyrant hyenas shall be overthrown,
And the fruitful fields of Virginia
Shall be trod by wild beasts alone.
For that day we all must labour,
Though we'll be the mighty gang.
Lions, tigers, zebras and peacocks,
All must toil for us now again!

My anthem gave rise to the sunrise. The North American Prairie was the night before a dark, war-scarred place. The then king of the Pridelands, Mufasa, had become king after his father Ahadi's death. Ahadi had fought bravely against the hyena and the Outlander lioness army- both helmed by his younger son (and Mufasa's brother) Scar.

However, the battle was won and Mufasa and Sarabi ascended to the throne of Pride Rock. They viewed their kingdom from the Promontory. Sarabi felt birth pangs, and decided to walk into the royal den. When the child was born, Mufasa walked up the Promontory, and called on the animals with the Roar of the Firstborn.

The next morning, the cry of a teenage red-crowned crane suddenly broke the silence of the savannah - "Nant's Ingonyama Bagithi Baba!!!!!!"

A herd of rhinos, grazing on the grass, heard the Zulu chant echo in the wind. A crowd of meerkats walked up and stood on their feet, sensing a new and glorious morn.

A topi couple turned their heads toward the direction of Pride Rock. A cheetah walked up a knoll and moved her ears to catch the reverb of the cry. She saw overhead a flock of marabou storks fly up and away over the great waterfall.

As the sun rose like a curtain being lifted up, worldwide animal herds from all over the Pridelands came walking, strutting, ambling, flying, and creeping. They crossed rivers and entire lakes. Birds flew in their multitudes, and the reptiles and insects made their way over to Pride Rock as well.

Gazelles leaped and bounded. Flamingoes flew on. A giraffe and her calf, who were strolling over to see the commotion, suddenly spotted a number of animals and ran off to join it. Zebras kicked up the sand as they came bounding on in their numbers. A herd of elephants marched carefully behind a flock of guineafowl.

A zebra herd splashed water all over the banks of a lake, as a myriad of animals- colorful birds, elephants, wildebeest, hippos- all made their way through the lake. Egrets came in large numbers, and zebras and gazelles in their thousands walked among leopards and cheetahs in their tens. Primates and parakeets, rodents and rhinos- all gathered to cast their eyes upon the new king- the son and firstborn of Mufasa and Sarabi.

Zazu the red-billed hornbill flew in, and genuflected before

the proud and austere-looking Mufasa- who returned Zazu's greeting with a warm, amiable smile.

Mufasa then saw his dear friend, the red-crowned crane we spoke of in the beginning. Tamino makes her way through the buffaloes and kudu. She climbed up Pride Rock and threw her long, wings around the king in fraternal love and friendship. Mufasa then turned to his queen and wife Sarabi, in whose forelegs lay a golden cub- he who had just been born, and whose birth was announced unto the gathering throng of animals below Pride Rock's Promontory.

The millions of Pridelander animals were visited by Zazu, who flew around making sure all were in discipline for the ceremony. Tamino, meanwhile, was busy anointing the newborn cub- whom she had dubbed "SIMBA". She gave him the name because of his significance as the "lion of lions". She smeared a tiny dab of dust and pulp over Simba's forehead, and, followed by his parents, took the cub in her arms and walked up to the promontory.

The animals stretched their necks and birds flew up out of curiosity. They were anxious to see the newborn prince.

Then, Tamino took up the cub in both her hands and held him up firmly for all the animals to see. Mufasa and Sarabi bowed to each other in love and pride.

The animals leaped, jumped, and danced for joy. Birds flew in intricate and well-formed geometric patterns, and even the reptiles and amphibians were happy. All were elated at Simba. They had high hopes for him.

Mufasa and Sarabi looked up into the heavens. They saw several rays of sun pierce through the clouds and descend upon their son, at which the whole congregation bowed their heads and genuflected at the prince.

The animals then resumed cheering and leaping up in happiness. Prince Simba was born!

Once the ceremony was over, several animals approached to give their congrats to the king and queen. But one animal didn't show up, one not missed much by the creatures of the Pride Lands. And that was Scar, Mufasa's younger brother.

Mufasa didn't let his disappointment show, but he couldn't help feeling it. He had no idea why Scar started hating him, but he had hoped that his brother would put aside his jealous feelings for family, just one day. Sadly, Scar didn't seem to care, acting as bitter and resentful as before. Their parents, King Ahadi and Queen Uru, had chosen Mufasa as king since he was firstborn, and that somehow made him a villain in Scar's eyes. Scar had not started life this way, but he had indeed become a bitter creature, stirring discontent among the younger lions and scoffing at the more conservative lions.

"Zazu," Mufasa called to the bird greeting the animals. "Come here, if you'd please."

The hornbill flew over and landed on Mufasa's shoulder. "Yes, Sire?" he asked with a grin. But when he saw his king's frown, he frowned as well and sniffed in contempt. "Ah...he didn't come to the ceremony this morning? Why am I not surprised?"

"No, he had not come," replied Mufasa. "I was hoping he would set aside his grudge, but he hadn't. If you'd like to tell him that I'm on my way so I can talk to him..."

"Already on it," interrupted Zazu. He flapped his wings and took off towards the lower part of Pride Rock.

Mufasa watched him go before turning back to his family. He

wanted to spend more time with them, telling Sarabi how proud he was of her and how much he loved her, and fussing over baby Simba. Then after that, he would go and confront Scar, lion to lion.

Chapter 2

In a cave below Pride Rock, Scar was stewing. The kingdom was celebrating the birth of the brat they called "Simba". In fact, it was so loud that the cave walls seemed to vibrate from the noise. Was it too much to ask for some peace and quiet in his own cave? All that fuss over one stupid little cub. It was completely disgusting and very typical of Mufasa to do.

Scar scraped his cave's floor with his claws. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a mouse sniffing nearby, looking for something to eat. Even if it wasn't a buffalo, at least he had something to eat here. If he were out on the savannah, he would have been a good hunter if it hadn't been for the scar over his left eye. He had been deemed to not be a good hunter by the older lions, so he was never brought out for hunting, not even for lessons. In his cave, however, he was a wise and mighty hunter in his own eyes.

He slunk towards the mouse, making sure that it didn't notice him or sniff his scent out. As he was right behind the mouse, he lifted his paw and slammed it down onto the small creature. The mouse squeaked and wriggled when Scar gripped its tail between his toes and lifted it up to his face.

"Life's not fair, is it, my little friend?" the lion muttered,

watching the mouse trying desperately to escape its predator. "While some are born to feast, others spend their lives in the dark...begging for scraps. The way I see it, you and I are both the same." He slightly released his grasp on the mouse's tail. "We both want a way out."

The mouse seemed to wriggle free and tried to leap away, but Scar caught it again. Jealousy was gnawing at the inner core of his being. It should have been him who was greeting the animals out there, not Mufasa. And as if it weren't bad enough, his son had to be born, booting him down from his spot as next in line for king. But that wasn't all. In the past, his father Ahadi had always showered Mufasa with praise and attention while leaving Scar out in the cold. Ahadi had given him the top position of the Lion Guard, a band of lions that protected the Pride Lands and their way of life...as a consolation prize of sorts.

But ever since he used the Roar Of The Elders to wipe out the Lion Guard, persuaded by a strange lion, Scar had felt as if his life was getting worse. The strange lion had betrayed him (back when he was known as Askari) by giving him a scar through a cobra bite, telling him to work with him to get the cure. Scar had killed him and the cobra too, but the venom was slowly affecting his thinking and emotions, and Mufasa and Ahadi seemed to joke about the scar, calling him that as well. To blazes with going to the Tree of Life to be cured, he had thought bitterly. If the path to becoming king meant bearing the venom and losing his sanity, so be it.

"You see...I will never be king. And you," he added with a smirk, holding on to the mouse's tail, "shall never see the light of another day. Adieu."

He opened his jaws and was just ready to eat the mouse whole when a flapping of wings filled the cave. Then a familiar scolding voice echoed in the cave, demanding, "Didn't your mother ever tell you to not play with your food?"

Scar glared around at who had interrupted his meal. It was a familiar blue-and-white hornbill bird with a large red beak, holding his head up with an important flair. Zazu was almost as bad as his brother and twice as annoying with his pompous attitude. He also seemed to be constantly nervous, even though no lion in the pride was to gravely harm or eat him.

"What do you want, Zazu?" he grumbled.

"I just wanted to let you know that King Mufasa has requested an audience with you," said Zazu, bowing as he usually did to Scar's annoyance. "This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill. He is on his way, so you'd better have a good excuse on missing the ceremony."

As Zazu talked, the mouse slipped out from under Scar's paw and scurried into a hole in the cave wall.

"Oh, look, Zazu," the lion griped with a pout, "you made me lose my lunch."

Zazu scoffed. "You'll lose more than that when the king gets here and you answer to him," he said, folding his wings over his chest. "He's as mad as a hippo with a hernia."

I answer to no one, you featherbrained fool, Scar scoffed silently. Then as soon as the thought left his mind, he gave Zazu a creepy smile while he leaned in. "Oh, I quiver with fear," he hissed as he started to stalk toward the hornbill, who now looked frightened.

"Scar...Scar-Scar-Scar-Scar-Scar-Scar...don't look at me that way," Zazu stammered, backing away from the stalking lion.

But Scar didn't. Even if he wasn't to be king, that didn't mean he couldn't enjoy himself, and that involved hurting creatures smaller than himself. "Are you hungry, Zazu?" he drawled. "Maybe we can share a bite together."

With the word "bite" escaping his lips, he pounced. Zazu squawked and tried flying away. Scar swiped his paws to try and swat the hornbill to the ground.

"You can't eat me!" Zazu squawked with fear. "It's forbidden to eat a member of the king's court!"

But Scar didn't care. With a sneer, he swiped his paw as Zazu tried to fly away, catching him and sending him to the ground. He stepped towards the dazed bird and pinned his small body with his paw, opening his jaws to take a bite.

"SCAR! Release him."

Scar looked up from his catch outside the cave. There he was: Mufasa, king of the Pridelands. He was a large male lion, bigger than Scar. He looked a lot more well-fed too, muscles rippling from under his golden tawny coat.

Zazu's beak popped out from under Scar's paw to say "Impeccible timing, Your Majesty!" before Scar released the bird, who ruffled his feathers.

"Why, if it isn't my big brother who's descended from up high to mingle with the commoners," Scar said with a false smile.

But Mufasa wasn't smiling. "First, I don't want to see you treat Zazu like that again. He is my top advisor, and you will show him kindness and respect," the Lion King chided. "And second, Sarabi and I didn't see you at the presentation of Simba."

Scar put on a surprised façade. "That was today? Oh, I feel simply awful!" He reached up and scraped the rock wall with his claws, making a screeching sound which made Zazu cringe. "Must have slipped my mind. Of course, I mean no disrespect toward His Majesty...or Sarabi." His green eyes seemed to gleam at the name he uttered. "As you know, brother, I have tremendous respect for the queen."

Mufasa felt the fur along his spine bristle, and Scar smirked at the affect his words had on him. It was never comfortable to be in the same area as the brothers whenever they argued. One could feel Mufasa's anger and Scar's indifference at the same time. Zazu was one who could do just that.

"Well, as slippery as your mind is," Zazu spoke up testily, "as the king's brother, you should've been first in line!" But a snap from Scar's teeth sent the bird flying away and hiding behind Mufasa.

"Oh, I was first in line," Scar said with a bit of a growl. "But don't you remember, Zazu? I was first until the precious little hairball was born."

"That 'hairball' is my son," Mufasa retorted, "and your future king."

Scar smirked. "Oh, I think I'll go practice my curtsey." At this, he began to walk away, not wanting to deal with his brother and the annoying bird.

"Don't turn your back on me, Scar!" Mufasa growled. Scar's blatant disrespect and contempt was starting to irritate him.

"Oh no, Mufasa," Scar replied with a smirk over his shoulder. "Perhaps you shouldn't turn your back on me."

With a thunderous roar, Mufasa charged forward until he blocked the cave entrance, the brothers locking eyes with each other. "Is that a challenge?" he snarled.

It was no secret that Scar had once challenged Mufasa for control of the pride. The battle was fierce between the two brothers, taking place on a stormy night, and Mufasa had

won. Scar had lost, the scar over his eyes having been reopened until it was red, and his behavior had gotten worse.

Scar rolled his eyes. "Temper, temper. I wouldn't dream of challenging you." With a smirk, he couldn't help but utter, "Again."

"Pity," Zazu snapped from beside Mufasa. "Why not?"

"Well, as far as brains go, I got the lion's share. But when it comes to brute strength..." At this point, he lifted his gaze to glare at Mufasa at this part before walking past them. "I'm afraid I'm at the shallow end of the gene pool. And the great Mufasa will always reign."

"Not always," Mufasa responded. "One day, it will be Simba who rules this land. As I have said, Simba will be your king."

"Then long live the king," Scar muttered. Then he slunk away, feeling thirsty and not wanting to stick around with Mufasa any longer.

Mufasa watched him go with a sigh. Though it didn't end with any fighting, he still felt tense after their meeting. This was not how he wanted things to do. He had hoped to hear of a good reason why Scar had missed out on the ceremony, to bond together as they once had when they were cubs. Sadly, that wasn't going to happen anytime soon.

"There's one in every family, Sire," said Zazu, flying up to rest

on Mufasa's shoulder. "Two in mine, actually. And they always manage to ruin special occasions."

Mufasa shook his head. "What am I going to do with him?"

Zazu smirked and replied, "He'd make a very handsome throw rug."

"Zazu!" Mufasa chided, but he couldn't help but smile.

"And when he gets dirty, you can take him out and beat him!" continued Zazu, making Mufasa laugh. Then he continued, stating his dream solution, "Or why not just throw him out of his den with your teeth and claws? I'm serious! You and I both know that he should've been thrown out of the Pride Lands a long time ago."

This time, Mufasa stopped laughing and smiling. No matter how disrespectful or snide Scar had acted, he was still Mufasa's brother. He wasn't sure what had made Scar act the way he was acting now, but he still wanted to help him.

"He's my brother, Zazu," he reminded his advisor. "So this is his home. As long as I'm king, that will never change. I will help him back on the right path, even if it kills me."

"As I said, there's one in every family," replied Zazu. "Why, one of my cousins thought that he was a woodpecker. He slammed his head into trees, and goodness knows that hornbill beaks aren't built for it. Because of this, he had

concussions regularly, and - "

He stopped and looked around. Mufasa was gone.

Zazu sighed. "And of course, you're gone."

The rain had come to North America, showering the land with rain and storms. It was still the wet season, so it rained every few days. The grass remained green, but no animals came out to graze just yet. Lightning flashed across the sky, and the thunder rolled.

In a baobab tree, Tamino was at work. After the ceremony, she returned to her lone baobab tree, painting a picture of the newborn prince.

She had done this with Mufasa when you are younger, just as your own teacher had done so with King Ahadi.

She hummed as she continued her work, finishing on the facial features. She chuckled, knowing that she was getting the cub's features right. Other creatures that shared the baobab with her - including insects, spiders, and birds - came around to witness her work. Then, remembering the ceremony, she gently smeared the painting's forehead with a little paint.

"Simba!" she said with a chuckle. This cub was going to have a good future ahead of him, he (Simba) was sure of that.

Chapter 3

A brand new day was going to dawn on the Pride Lands several months later; the rains had come and gone. While young Simba grew in size until he was a healthy cub, having lost the baby fat when he was a baby, he also grew in confidence and adventure. From the time when the sun rose to when it set, he was full of energy, only finally settling down when it was time for bed.

One morning, Simba woke up earlier than the other lions. He had just come out of a dream of him and his father rescuing a family of mongooses and fighting off crocodiles together. He watched the savannah below Pride Rock, ready to get out there and explore. He looked back to see if one of the cubs had gotten up too, but they were still asleep. But Simba realized that he didn't need a playmate today; no, today was the day he would get to spend quality time with his father.

"Dad! Dad!" he yowled, running back into the cave. "Come on, we gotta go! Wake up!"

He jumped among the mass of lionesses and cubs, trying not to step on them. Even though he did pounce on another lion's back by accident, he apologized, which was returned with a sleepy grunt. Finally, Simba reached the back of the cave, where his parents slept. While Simba had grown since his ceremony, he was still tiny compared to his father Mufasa.

"Dad!" Simba chirped, trying to get Mufasa's attention. But Mufasa answered with a snore, leading Simba to whine, "Daaadd..."

Sarabi had opened an eye, to make sure that her son wasn't hurt or sick. When she saw that he was just antsy, she smiled

and closed her eye again. "Your son is awake," she mumbled to Mufasa with amusement.

"Before sunrise, he is your son," Mufasa muttered back among Simba's repeating of "Dad".

In the meantime, Simba kept trying his best to wake his father up. Tugging on his ear didn't work, since he ended up tumbling into some bones, so he tried headbutting the area below his jaw. "You promised!" he said with a pout.

Mufasa opened his eyes to find himself staring into Simba's pouting face, half drowsy and half amused. "Okay, okay," he muttered. "I'm up."

Simba cheered and spun around in a few circles. Mufasa let out a loud yawn, which sounded a bit like a roar. Beside him, Sarabi rolled onto her paws, bending down to lick his cheek, which he returned with a gentle headbutt.

While the other lionesses and their cubs were beginning to stir, the royal family walked out of the cave. Simba darted over to his mother, rubbing against her legs, and Sarabi nuzzled him in return, nudging him along. She watched father and son leave with a smile on her muzzle.

"So what'll we do today, Dad?" Simba asked once they left Sarabi behind. "Give orders for the hunt? Chase any bad guys out?"

Mufasa didn't answer, only strolled ahead. But he was heading towards the back of Pride Rock, not away from it.

"Dad?" Simba piped up, confused. "You're going the wrong

way!"

Mufasa grinned over his shoulder. "Who says I'm going the wrong way?" was all he asked before walking on. "Come. Follow me."

So Simba decided not to argue and followed his father. While he struggled to leap from ledge to ledge on the side of Pride Rock, Mufasa merely pulled himself up with ease. He was an adult, so it was easier for an adult to do it than a cub. Simba was already feeling tired from the climb, but he didn't want to give up now. Finally, they reached the top, and Simba walked over to sit by Mufasa, who sat near the edge of the top of Pride Rock, looking out towards the horizon before letting out a roar. To Mufasa, it was to signal to the kingdom that he had awoken and was ready to start the day.

Nothing happened for a few moments after the roar, and soon, it felt like hours. Simba almost wished he hadn't gotten up so early; that way, whatever Mufasa wanted to show him could come sooner.

"What're we doing up here?" Simba mewed. "There's nothing going on. Am I even allowed to be up here?"

Mufasa shifted his gaze to Simba, his eyes and face serious. Then he looked back to the horizon. "Look, Simba," he rumbled. "Everything the light touches is our kingdom."

Simba followed his gaze and looked out to the savannah. The sun was now rising, huge and magnificent and golden, bathing the land with orange and yellow. Life was beginning to stir on the open plains and forests that inhabited the Pride Lands. It was a beautiful sight, a breathtaking view, and

anything else that Simba wished he could describe better.

"Wow...you rule all of this?" the cub asked his father.

Mufasa nodded. "Yes. A king's time as ruler rises and falls like the sun. One day, Simba, the sun will set on my time here, and it will rise with you as the new king."

Simba lowered his ears at the tone of Mufasa's voice. He seemed to have a mixture of seriousness and sadness in his tone. A shiver ran through Simba's fur as he thought of his father possibly dying, and it made him sad. But the sadness was suddenly replaced by realization.

"Wait, you're saying that this will all be mine?" he asked Mufasa.

"In a way. Though it does not entirely belong to the king, or to anyone," Mufasa added. "This land will be yours to protect. As king, it is my duty to protect everything the light touches, to be the first servant to the kingdom, and it will be your duty one day to carry on in my place."

Simba nodded and turned his head anywhere he could see. Mufasa knew that it was too much for a young cub to take in all at once, but he would learn. Lions had been known to grow up fast in the Pride Lands, more than anywhere else in North America.

"Everything the light touches..." Simba repeated his father's words, his eyes darting to the watering hole and the mountains. Then he noticed a darker area outside the Pride Lands' borders. "What about that shadowy place?"

"That's beyond our borders, in the Outlands," Mufasa replied, his eyes on the shadowy place. "You must never go there, Simba."

"But I thought a king can do whatever he wants," Simba questioned. "You know, take some territory."

Mufasa smirked. "Oh, there's more to being a king than getting your way all the time."

Simba's face lit up, and his ears perked. "There's more?"

"Simba..." Mufasa broke off with an amused laugh. Then he let his face become serious as he said, "Yes, there is more. While others search for what they can take, a true king searches for what he can give."

It sounded a bit too complicated for Simba. He wanted to know more about how being a king meant being in charge of the place. But he wanted to learn more from his father. So when Mufasa began climbing down from Pride Rock, Simba did his best to match his stride and amble.

While they walked, Mufasa pointed out the various places in the Pride lLands. He introduced Simba to the grove where the elephants rested in the shade, a small oasis where smaller animals could live, and everything else. Other animals were up already and moving about. Birds were flocking in the air, and two young male rhinos were practicing their fighting, their horns clashing. For the predators, he saw wild dogs feeding their pups from a zebra carcass, regurgitating the meat so that the pups had something softer to eat.

As a herd of antelope raced by, Simba wanted to join in their

run, try to even catch one. But Mufasa shook his head; there would be time for that later.

"Everything you see exists together in a delicate balance," he told his son as they walked on. "As king, you need to understand that balance. To understand that balance, you must respect all the creatures, from the crawling ant to the leaping antelope."

"But Dad, don't we eat the antelope?" Simba asked, watching the antelope disappear behind some shrubs.

Mufasa nodded. "Yes, Simba, but let me explain. When we die, our bodies become the grass, and the antelope eat the grass. And so, we are all connected in the great Circle of Life."

Simba looked down with his father to the watering hole, where plenty of animals were gathering. Zebras were drinking from the shallow end, giraffes were browsing from the acacia trees, bears are catching salmon, vultures are circling around, and birds called oxpeckers were landing on these animals, picking off any parasites for their next meal. As for Simba, he was amazed and stunned at how much the world worked.

Suddenly, a voice chirped above them, "Good morning, Sire!" Father and son looked up as Zazu flew in from above and landed before them on a rock. His bright red beak seemed to be the only thing in the Pride Lands that was brighter than the sun.

"Good morning, Zazu," Mufasa greeted.

"Checking in for the morning report," Zazu said with a quick bow.

"Fire away," Mufasa replied.

"Well, the buzz from the bees is that the flamingos are taking a stand," Zazu reported. Mufasa nodded for him to go on, and he did. "The leopards are in a bit of a spot, and the baboons are going ape over this. The giraffes were caught necking, but of course, they are acting like they were above it all. Pua and his crocodiles are snapping up fresh offers by the banks..."

While Zazu talked and Mufasa listened, Simba was getting a little bored with hearing all of the morning report. Just then, he noticed a cricket hopping around. He waited while Mufasa and Zazu were talking and then started following the cricket. He pounced after it, but it was always out of reach.

"What are you doing?" Mufasa asked curiously.

Simba stopped pouncing when he realized that he hadn't caught the cricket. "Pouncing."

Mufasa had a big grin on his face. "Some fun, eh? Let an old pro show you how it's done."

Meanwhile, Zazu was continuing his morning report. "The tick birds are pecking on the elephants. I told the elephants to forget it, but they can't. The cheetahs are hard up from failing to steal the baboons' dinner. But as I always say, cheetahs never prosper." He paused to laugh at his joke before continuing. "The vultures have a hunch that not everyone will be back from lunch. The buffalo have a beef

about this season's grass, then the warthogs have been thwarted in attempts to save their gas. Then the grizzly bears are chasing secretary birds, then the wolves in the pack are howling in the morning. I'm like, Wolves, we get it. I noticed the sea lions on the beach with penguins. Nine wild dogs have caught a carcass followed by otters playing in the river. The dolphins are doing extraordinary leaps in the pool, the beetles are rolling dung followed by the zebras that play with impala. I noticed hippos and rhinos in the mud rolling around."

"Stay low to the ground," Mufasa whispered to Simba, his voice so low that Zazu couldn't hear. Simba nodded and repeated it to himself a few times, leading Mufasa to scold gently, "Not a sound."

"What's going on?" Zazu asked, taking a short break from his report.

"Just giving Simba a pouncing lesson," replied Mufasa. "Turn around, please."

"Oh, right. Pouncing." Then Zazu squawked with shock, "Pouncing?! Oh, Sire, you can't be serious!"

All Mufasa did was smirk and signal for Zazu to turn around. Zazu groaned but did as he was told, muttering, "This is so humiliating..."

In the meantime, Mufasa was still instructing Simba on how to hunt. "Check the wind," he murmured. "Stay in the shadows, and take it slow. And wait for the perfect moment to pounce."

"What are you telling him now?" Zazu demanded.

But when he looked around, no one answered or was in sight. No one except the sounds of other birds singing.

"Mufasa?" peeped Zazu, cringing. "...Simba?"

And just like that, Simba came out of nowhere, catching Zazu off guard. He pounced until he slammed Zazu to the ground. Mufasa laughed, and Simba left his "catch", trotting back to his father with his head and tail high.

Zazu got up, grumbling and dusting off his feathers. He was just about to fly over and remind the lions that he was their advisor, not their plaything when a mole rat popped out of the ground. He whispered something to Zazu, leading the majordomo to fly up and check the area.

In the meantime, Mufasa was still praising Simba for his pouncing skills. He was just going to instruct him some more on new hunting techniques when Zazu suddenly flew down to them. "Sire!" he shrieked. "Hyenas, in the Pride Lands! They're on the hunt!"

Immediately, Mufasa was on alert. He was no longer laughing, his face has become deadly serious. "Is Sarabi with the lionesses? Can you see them?"

"Yes, they're trying to drive those brutes out," Zazu reported.

"Good. Zazu, take Simba home," Mufasa commanded. "I have to help defend our borders."

With that, he began to run off. The hyenas had broken their

agreement of not intruding into the Pride Lands. They had their own land, while those living in the Pride Lands had theirs. Borders were needed for this purpose, his father had once told him. Now he would need to drive them out yet again.

"Aw, Dad, can I come?" Simba begged. "I can help!"

"No, Simba," Mufasa told him sternly. "This isn't something for young ones to get involved with. You stay with the other cubs, where it's safe."

And with that, he ran off. Simba tried one more time to go after him, but Zazu flew down and landed in his path. In the meantime, Mufasa was now nothing more than a speck slowly disappearing.

"I never get to go anywhere," Simba grumbled aloud as he marched back to Pride Rock.

"Oh, young master, you will. One day, you'll be king," Zazu reminded him. "And then you can chase those slobbering mangy stupid poachers from dawn till dusk! Now come, let's get you home."

Simba grumbled, but he followed Zazu while the hornbill took to the air. He had wanted to spend the entire day with Mufasa, helping him out. But instead, he had to spend the rest of the day with the other cubs. Life wasn't fair at times.

Simba watched the other cubs at play, partaking in games like Catch The Tail or Pounce On The Pebble; one of the cubs (a male named Tojo) even let some birds he and Simba had raised roost on his back. Right now, though, he wasn't in the

mood for playing with his peers. He usually liked hanging around with the other cubs, but a part of him still pouted over being left behind by Mufasa.

I'll show him I can hunt, he decided to himself. Then he'll have to take me hunting and fighting with him.

He looked around, looking for something to hunt. He saw Zazu perching on a branch near the edge of the cubs' clearing, keeping an eye on them along with some of the other lionesses. But Simba decided not to for two reasons. The first was that Zazu was out of reach, and the second was that he had pounced on him earlier anyway. So he kept looking for a target to pounce on, one that would not fly away.

The other cubs were another option. But Simba would tell them what he was doing, and they would want to play too. He just wasn't in the mood to have the other cubs butting in on his fun.

So he kept looking again until he noticed a blue beetle climbing on a log not far away. It was minding its own business, and it was also the perfect target for his hunt. Remembering what Mufasa taught him, Simba slunk low in the grass. He was inching farther away from the other cubs until he was near the bottom of Pride Rock. The beetle kept going it's merry way; if it knew that Simba was stalking it, it paid him no attention.

"I'm gonna be a mighty king," he whispered to himself, edging closer to the beetle. "Enemies beware..."

He crept ever so close to the beetle, up until his face was

near its shiny blue body. Suddenly, the beetle extended its wings and fluttered off, leaving Simba to watch it go...and then it landed in front of him again. Simba smiled and prepared for his pounce.

"If you wish to kill something, you might want to stay downwind."

Simba whipped around and jumped a foot into the air. Scar was watching him from the shadow of his own den, laying down and glowering. His dark tawny fur and black mane were well hidden in the shadows, which was why Simba was startled. The cub himself wondered if his uncle was ever in a good mood to talk.

"I know how to hunt, Uncle Scar," Simba told the dark lion. "I'm just helping protect the Pride Lands. Watch!"

He pounced at the beetle, but it flew off for good this time. All that left Simba to do was crash into the rock nose-first. He backed away, grumbling and rubbing his nose with a paw.

"Well, let's pray that we're never attacked by a beetle. Wouldn't want to have a scar like mine, would we?" Scar responded, his scowl almost making a sneer. He turned away with his back towards Simba, swishing his tail. "Now go back to the other cubs. I don't babysit."

In spite of Scar's harshness, Simba wasn't let down. His father showing him the kingdom was still buzzing in his mind, the thought of becoming king buzzing even more.

"Oh, wait a minute!" he said, running up towards the den. "Hey, Uncle Scar, guess what?"

Scar, who was already back in his den, stopped strolling and rolled his eyes. "I despise guessing games."

"I'm gonna be king of Pride Rock," Simba boasted.

Scar scowled even more until his teeth were almost bared. He didn't want to be reminded that he would not get to be king, not while Mufasa and his bratty cub were still alive. "Is that so?" he muttered with dripping sarcasm, giving Simba a withering glare when the cub's back was turned.

Simba walked over towards Scar until he climbed onto the rock hanging near the entrance of his den. "Think about it. When I'm king, I get to give you orders and tell you what to do. How weird is that?"

"Oh, goody," Scar grumbled. Hearing all this made him want to throw up or hack up hairballs like he had seen caracals do once upon a time.

"Dad showed me the entire kingdom this morning. And I'm gonna rule it all!" Simba added with a laugh.

"Well, forgive me for not leaping for joy," growled Scar. "Bad back, you know."

And with that, he flopped down to the cave floor, trying to ignore Simba. But the cub's scent told him that Simba was still there, curious as ever.

Simba followed him into the cave. He had never been in here before, and now he could see why. It felt colder than the den above them, the air smelled funny, and bones seemed to

litter the ground like old branches. This place seemed creepy, but his curiosity won him over.

"Hey Uncle Scar," Simba said, running over and leaning on Scar's black mane. "When I'm king, what does that make you?"

"A monkey's uncle," Scar grumbled.

Simba laughed and tumbled away from Scar. "You're so weird."

This time, Scar grinned. "You have no idea," he said, just as an idea was taking seed in his mind. He lifted himself up and walked to the entrance of his cave. "So your father showed you the whole kingdom, did he?"

"Everything," replied Simba. "He showed me the watering hole, the mountains, just...everything."

"He didn't show you what's beyond that rise at the northern border, though, did he?" Scar pressed on.

Simba groaned and sat down. He didn't know that Scar had known about the shadowy place at the border. "No. He said I can't go there. Ever."

"And he's absolutely right!" Scar declared to Simba's surprise. "It's far too dangerous. Only the bravest lions go there."

As Scar had predicted, Simba perked up, curious. "Well, I'm brave. What's out there?"

"No, I'm sorry, Simba. I just can't tell you," Scar said with a bit of a pompous air, turning away from him.

"Why not?"

"Simba, Simba," Scar said, gently rubbing the cub's head, "I'm only looking out for the well-being of my favorite nephew."

Simba playfully wriggled out of his uncle's grasp. "Yeah, right. I'm your only nephew."

Scar grinned. "All the more reason for me to be protective. An elephant graveyard is no place for a young prince." Then he pretended to gasp and say, "Oops!"

"An elephant what?" Simba mewed in amazement. No wonder Mufasa didn't want him going there; though it could just be the bones everywhere, that was a place he wanted to go. "Whoa!"

"Oh dear, I've said too much!" Scar chided himself. Then he grinned again, a crafty grin. "Well, I suppose you'd have found out sooner or later, you being so clever and all."

"Have you been there?" Simba asked, more curious than ever. Mufasa had always told him to leave Scar alone, saying that he wasn't a very social lion. But so far, Scar didn't seem so bad to him, once he got past the grumpy attitude.

Scar grinned. "Of course. Every lion has been there. I've been there, your father was there, your mother was there, and...basically, every lion who's anybody has been there. However, it's no place for a cub." When Simba scowled at the

thought of 'cub' being mentioned again, Scar pressed on, "Seriously, it's pretty dangerous there for a cub. All those rotting bones and oozing puddles of mud are just...well, I daresay that it would take a full year to get the filth from there off of your fur."

While his words were discouraging, they intrigued Simba. Now he really wanted to go there and find out what the place was like. It was way too tempting to pass up. It would even be worth it to see all those rotting bones and oozing mud.

"It's just one appalling area to avoid at all costs. Just promise me one thing," Scar said, pulling Simba in close for a hug. "Promise me you'll never visit that dreadful place!"

It almost sounded fun, the elephant graveyard. If anything, Scar's words seemed to encourage him even more, making him want to go there. But he gave Scar a smile and replied, "No problem!"

Scar smiled in return and let Simba up. "There's a good lad. You run along now, have some fun, and play. And remember," he called before Simba could run off some more, "it's our little secret, your majesty."

Simba ran off, leaving Scar behind. It was a secret that he wasn't going to tell anyone at all...well, almost everyone. There was one person he would go ask about the elephant graveyard. So he ran off to find that someone.

As for Scar, he smirked and headed back into his den. That was much easier than he had thought. Hearing Simba talk about how he would be king was even more unbearable, now that Mufasa had to blab about the "Circle of Life". So he

decided that, in order to be next in line again, Simba would need to go.

Simba ran as he could from one end of Pride Rock to the other, trying to search for that someone to tell his secret to. It definitely couldn't be one of the adults, for they would know what he was up to. He would be in big trouble, and so could Uncle Scar for telling him about it. No, he would have to tell his best friend only.

One of those places was an outcropping where his mother Sarabi lay with the other lionesses in the pride. She must have gotten back from chasing the hyenas away, looking relaxed already in spite of the new scars on her pelt, and the other lionesses had begun their first-morning hunt. Near her was her friend Sarafina, who was giving her daughter a hunting lesson.

When they saw a gazelle, the lionesses and Nala charged and pounced on the gazelle.

Now, the lionesses and Nala had begun the next hunt, hunting for zebras.

Her daughter, Nala, was one of Simba's closest friends in the Pride Lands, a young light-furred female cub with teal eyes.

Nala herself was eager to spend the day with Simba. They would often get into mischief together and hang out together, like going to the watering hole, pretending that other lions' tails were a snake, and practicing fighting. Being friends with a prince certainly had its advantages. It even felt nice to be treated like royalty, even if she and her mother weren't royal like Mufasa and his queen and son.

But today, she had to get the next hunting lesson from her mother. Fortunately for her, her luck changed. Simba came running into the clearing, greeting the other lionesses as they greeted the prince.

"Hey, Nala," Simba greeted her when he got to her.

"Hi, Simba," Nala greeted back with a smile.

Simba smiled too and darted a bit away. "Come on, I just heard about this great place."

Nala frowned as her mother kept hunting for a zebra. "Simba, I'm going hunting with my mother."

"This is a place your mother would never go," said Simba.

"So where is it? Better not be any place lame!" said Nala.

"No, it's really cool," said Simba.

"So, where is this really cool place?" asked the lionesses.

Simba had almost forgotten that his own mother was behind him. "Oh...around the watering hole."

Nala looked up from her first hunt, unimpressed. "The watering hole? What's so great about the watering hole?"

Simba grinned up at his mother before turning to Nala. "I'll show you when we get there," he whispered tersely.

"Oh," Nala replied, now nodding in understanding. She looked

up at her mother with big teal eyes. "Mom, can I go with Simba?"

Sarafina shrugged before looking up at her friend and queen. "What do you think, Sarabi?"

"I do know that the hyenas could still be lurking around," Sarabi began. "Well..."

"Pleeeeease?" Simba and Nala asked with big grins.

"But I'm pretty sure we scared them off," Sarabi went on. "So as long as you stay in the shallow end, it's alright with me."

"Yeah!" "All right!" Simba couldn't believe that it worked; he was going to show Nala the elephant graveyard after all. They were just about to leave when what Sarabi said next ruined their mood: "You can go there as long as Zazu goes with you."

This caused them to grind to a halt. "Zazu?" said Simba and Nala.

"Oooh, no! Not Zazu!" Simba groaned. The hornbill was going to ruin his plan.

"Either Zazu goes with you, or you don't go at all," Sarabi called firmer this time. The lionesses continued their hunt again.

And there it was, Simba thought with a roll of his eyes. So they had to wait until Zazu came back to escort the cubs to their destination.

"Step lively, everyone! Come on! Step up! Let's move as a unit!" Zazu called from above the cubs. "The sooner we get there, the sooner we can leave! When we get to the watering hole, you are to stay in the shallow end."

The two cubs walked slowly along under Zazu's shadow, through the tall savannah grass. Soon, the soft soil underneath them would harden into tough earth once the dry season rolled around, but it was comforting for now. And other than Zazu occasionally humming to himself, it was pretty peaceful.

"So where are we really going?" Nala whispered. "You can't fool me, Simba. It's not the watering hole."

Simba turned to Nala in surprise. If there was one thing Nala knew well about him, it was that he always had a trick up his sleeve. "How'd you know that?"

Nala smiled. "It's not hard to guess. You hate getting in the water. So as I was asking, where are we going?"

"I've heard about this place, Nala," Simba whispered on. "The most incredible, the most amazing - "

At this, Nala swished her tail. "Just tell me where!"

"An elephant graveyard," Simba replied.

"WOW!" Nala exclaimed loudly.

Simba saw Zazu look down briefly at them, so he ran over to Nala's side to shush her. "Shh...Zazu!" he reminded her, eyes darting up to the hornbill.

Nala nodded. "Sorry. How far is it?"

"Not far," Simba replied, but then he realized that he had no idea how 'not far' it was. "Just to the shadowy place beyond the borders. My uncle Scar told me that everyone's been there."

"We've never been that far before. What if we get lost?" Nala asked, looking nervous for the first time.

Right now, Simba nearly felt the same way. He actually had no idea if he and Nala would find their way back home. Just the thought of being lost in the middle of the wilderness made him feel very small. It was a very scary thought.

But then again, he didn't want to be scared in front of Nala. He was the future king; kings were always brave and did not get lost. And after all, Scar even said that every lion had been there.

So he declared, "Relax, Nala. My dad and I patrolled the entire kingdom this morning. We don't have anything to worry about."

"Almost anything," said Nala, looking up to the sky. Simba followed her gaze and saw Zazu circling around as if he was being chased by bees.

Suddenly, Zazu began squawking. "We have an imminent threat! Something is approaching!" Then, as the cubs froze from fright, Zazu spoke again, relieved. "Oh, never mind. It's my own shadow." Then he continued monitoring the area, not embarrassed at all by his self-interruption.

When the cubs kept walking, Nala muttered, "So how are we going to ditch the dodo?"

"Leave it to me," Simba bragged. "And I'll get us to freedom."

Zazu's shadow grew bigger, and Simba looked up. The hornbill had landed on the ground before them, a big smile on his beak.

"How lovely it is to see the future king and queen," Zazu greeted them as he flew down. "Little seeds of romance blossoming on the savannah...your parents would be thrilled. It's so thrilling, I can just molt!"

Nala's ears perked. "What do you mean?"

"You know, you being betrothed and all," replied Zazu.

"What?" Simba was utterly confused.

Zazu flapped his wings. "You know...betrothed. Intended. Affianced."

"Simba, you speak bird?" Nala asked wryly.

"Meaning?" Simba asked, even more, confused than ever.

"Married! One day, you two will be married," Zazu informed them. When the cubs didn't respond, he added a bit more impatiently, "To each other!"

For one long moment, the cubs gave Zazu a look, and then at each other. Then Simba realized what Zazu meant. It meant

something along the lines of what Mufasa and Sarabi were to each other: a married couple. He and Nala made disgusting sounds at the thought of it.

"I can't marry her," Simba told Zazu. "She's my best friend!"

"Yeah, it'd be really weird," Nala added. "Plus, he can't eat impala."

"I can too," Simba argued. "I just don't like impala. Plus, you're the one who's scared of rhinos." He turned back to Zazu and declared, "Face it, Zazu. Nala and I are not getting married."

"A monarch who ignores tradition? The conservative way of life in the Pride Lands?" Zazu remarked while Simba mimicked Zazu's words in a mocking way behind him. "Sorry to burst your bubble, but you two turtledoves have no choice. It's a tradition going back generations."

Simba shared a smile with Nala. "When I'm king, that'll be the first thing to go."

Zazu sniffed. "Not so much when I'm around."

"In that case, you're fired," Simba said with a smirk.

"Hmph!" Zazu huffed. "Nice try, but only the king can do that."

"But he's the future king," Nala reminded Zazu.

"Yeah," Simba said with a smirk, jabbing Zazu's wing. "And that means you have to do what I tell you to do."

Zazu was now getting irritated, his feathers fluffing out. "Not yet, I don't! And with an attitude like that, I'm afraid you're shaping up to be a pretty pathetic king indeed!"

Simba smirked. "Not the way I see it. When I'm king, I won't let anyone tell me where to go, what to do, or even who to marry." He spun around on his heels and made a run for it, Nala keeping up with him. "There will never be a king like me!"

"Simba!" Zazu squawked behind them. "You can't escape from your destiny!"

"Just watch me!" Simba crowed back. "I'll be a mighty king!"

Zazu suddenly put on a burst of speed and landed in front of the cubs. "This would be a setback for the Pride Lands' royal family," he chided the prince. "No one will take a king acting like a cub seriously."

"I'm still growing up," Simba argued back. "I'm working on my roar!" He opened his mouth to roar, only for a meow-like sound to come out.

"Oh, bravo," Zazu said with dripping sarcasm, getting a headstart. "Shall I give you a grand prize for that roar?"

Simba and Nala rolled their eyes. They caught Zazu off guard by running off yet again. "You know, you're really annoying me, Zazu!" he called over his shoulders. "I won't listen to you when I'm older! I just can't wait to be king!"

Zazu was getting fed up with the disrespect he was getting

from the prince of the Pride Lands. He flapped his wings and took off after them, like an eagle homing in on a hare.

"You know what? That's it! I won't argue anymore!" he called down to them. "Forget going to the watering hole! We're going home right now!"

But the cubs didn't pay any attention. They got into flamingos. When Simba and Nala watched the flamingos fly off, they go in the middle of some zebras heading towards the watering hole, managing to lose Zazu in the herd. While Zazu tried finding them among the stripes and hooves, Simba and Nala made their getaway and ran for the watering hole using a shortcut. That included having to be briefly chased by banded mongooses since they used their tunnels as the shortcut.

When Zazu did manage to spot them, Simba and Nala noticed some ostriches heading towards the watering hole as well. The ostriches seemed to recognize Simba as the prince, for two lowered themselves to the ground and watch them. The cubs had a good time running faster meeting animals than the wind, and hearing talk among the ratites including the ostriches. According to one ostrich, her daughter Asha had her egg protected by a meerkat before she hatched. Once they were sure that they were away from Zazu, the ostriches try to peck Zazu before landing on a hippo submerged deep in the water.

They finally reached the watering hole, and it was packed. Animals were either drinking from the water or relaxing in the shallows. Zebra, antelope, giraffes, buffalo, and elephants drank at the water's edge. Rhinos and hippos rolled around in the mud near the shallow end. Birds used the water in the

shallow end to take a quick bath. Even the two only crocodiles in this watering hole didn't feel like eating; what mattered to them was resting in the sun.

"Simba! Nala!" Zazu called. He had put on as much speed as he could and flew as fast as he could. "Oh, where are you? Mufasa will have my pinfeathers for this...Simba! Nala! It's my duty to keep you safe!"

Any moment now, and Zazu would soon be upon them. Simba and Nala shared glances; they would have to do something quick, or they would be caught.

"Hello?" Simba tried to call above the noise. "Can anyone help us?"

Not many animals could hear them, though. The only one who answered was a young hippo, saying something to his parents before wallowing out of the mud. In spite of being a calf, he was still bigger than the two cubs combined. "Sure. I'd love to help," he said with a smile. "My name's Beshte."

"You see that hornbill over there, Beshte?" Simba asked. "The annoying one with the blue-and-white feathers and the big red beak?"

The hippo calf named Beshte nodded. "Yeah. That's the majordomo, Zazu. My dad's told me all about him." His ears waggled as he continued. "I've got a lot of questions to ask him. Like my dad always says, you learn something new every day."

"Then go ask him all the questions you want," Nala persuaded him. "Play with him. Anything."

Beshte nodded and plodded over to Zazu. The hornbill was still among the crowd, trying to ask if anyone had seen Simba. Simba and Nala watched the young hippo approach Zazu before turning around and running.

"Excuse me, young hippo. Have you seen a lion cub with golden fur and amber eyes?" Zazu was asking Beshte. "He's small, but he's cute. And so is the little paler cub with him."

"Yeah, I did see two cubs like that," said Beshte. "But I'm glad to meet you, Zazu. My name's Beshte. I've heard about you, and I've got a lot of questions to ask you."

Zazu nodded frantically. "Ask me only a few. I have two lion cubs to find!"

So Beshte asked away, starting with if Zazu had any children or what his favorite food was. He even asked who the best members of the Lion Guard had been. But as the hornbill was done, more baby animals crowded around him, asking questions of their own. While Zazu was distracted (along with weavers swarming around him), the two lion cubs made their getaway, running as far from the watering hole as they could.

They had done it. They had ditched Zazu and were going to the elephant graveyard.

Chapter 4

The two cubs made sure they were away from the watering hole. Wherever they were, Zazu was sure not to follow them

now. So Simba and Nala took a break, trying to get their breath back.

"All right! We lost him!" Nala panted. She had never done anything this exciting before in her life.

"I know what you're going to say," Simba gloated, his chest puffed out. "I am a genius, right?"

Nala glared indignantly at him. "Hey, genius, it was my idea."

"Yeah, but I pulled it off."

"With me!"

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah! We wouldn't get this far if it wasn't for your future queen," Nala retorted. She had been as shocked as Simba when Zazu said that they were betrothed, but the thought of being a queen really did sound interesting to her.

Simba snorted and waved a paw dismissively. "Aren't you forgetting something? There's not gonna be a future queen."

Nala's earlier thoughts of marriage vanished. If she was going to marry him, then she wouldn't want to be queen. "Fine by me," she retorted. "I'd rather marry an aardvark anyway."

"Good luck finding one that'll say yes," Simba said smugly.

Nala knew where this was getting to. They usually had friendly arguments that would lead up to taunting and then to wrestling. She decided to teach Simba a little lesson: he was

the future king, but he wasn't a king yet. She would remind him of that.

Eyes narrowing, Nala dropped into a crouch. "Good luck getting out of here without a scratch."

"Bring it on," Simba responded, crouching as well.

The two ran at each other, wrestling and trying to pin each other to the ground. Play was an important part of a young cub's life. It could teach them social skills or even how to hunt. In the end, Nala managed to pin Simba, who had been going for strength rather than wits.

"Pinned ya." Nala smiled at the indignant look on Simba's face. "You owe me an apology."

"Hey, lemme up!" Simba whined.

Nala got off of him, satisfied. Simba glared at her before a smirk came over his face, finding a way to pay her back.

So once Nala wasn't paying attention, Simba pounced again. The two tumbled and wrestled in their second round, this time rolling down a hill. But once they reached the bottom, Simba was expecting to pin her this time.

However, Nala rolled up first and pinned him a second time. "Pinned ya again," she gloated, while the prince just glared at her with indignance.

Simba smacks Nala lightly with his paws. Something ahead catches his eye. A large eerie cloud of oozing mud and hot smelly smoke appeared. Nala got off of Simba, and they

began to walk around. They went up a ridge and looked around at the landscape. It was nothing like the Pride Lands, mainly gray and brown with bones here and there. At one point, they jumped onto what was either a fallen tree, looking at the expanse before them.

All around them were bones, lots and lots of bones. If the Pride Lands had lots of grass, then this place had lots of bones. It wasn't just any bones either; these were the bones of elephants.

"This is it. We made it!" Simba whispered to Nala. "The elephant graveyard! It's amazing, isn't it?"

"We could get in big trouble," Nala replied with a snicker.

They looked around them some more, taking it all in. No bird song echoed here, only the sounds of vultures shrieking and steam vents rumbling. They wondered about the owners of these bones, the fossils of prehistoric animals. Why did all those extinct elephants come here? How did they know when to gather to die? It was pretty sad to think about, after all the live elephants they had seen in their young lives.

Soon, their eyes were fixed on one massive mastodon skull, both tusks standing and curving up like dead trees. "I wonder if its brains are still in there?" Nala remarked.

"I don't know," replied Simba, padding towards the skull. "Come on. Let's go check it out."

"WRONG!"

Simba jumped high in the air at the angry sound coming from

above him. Zazu now flew down in front of them, angrier and more scared than he had ever seen the hornbill be.

"The only checking out you'll do is out of here!" he snapped, ignoring Simba's gripes. "We're way beyond the boundary of the Pride Lands!"

At this, Simba chuckled. "Look at that. Banana Beak is scared!"

"It's Mister Banana Beak to you, fuzzy!" Zazu scolded, poking Simba's nose with a wing. "And right now, we are all in very real danger!"

"Danger? Ha!" Simba scoffed, walking over to near the bone and jumping on its face. "I walk on the wild side. I laugh in the face of danger." Then he turned to the skull and laughed into its eye sockets. "HA HA HA!"

His laugh echoed through the skull, ringing Simba's ears.

"Enough!" Zazu hissed. "You've proven how brave and utterly reckless you are! We're going home this instant!"

"Zazu does have a point. That's pretty bold," Nala added. "Besides, the sun's going down, and I don't wanna stick around until - "

But Simba followed it up with another "HA HA HA!" towards the cavity in the skull. Yet it was when sinister cackles reached his ears did Simba feel a prickle of fear on his fur. He immediately ran over to Nala and Zazu, fur bristling and heart racing.

And then the hyenas arrived. It was two hyenas, both males, with mottled brown coats, brown muzzles, and sharp teeth. They came half-slithering from the eye sockets of the skull like snakes and climbing down the tusks like leopards.

"Well, look at this," the stronger male hyena remarked with a smirk. His face was scarred, with part of his right ear missing. "We weren't expecting guests today. Would you two cubs like to stay for dinner?"

"Yeah!" interrupted a goofy-looking hyena, a big grin on his face. "Stay for dinner, because you look like a midday snack."

At this, the first male hyena turned on the second, a scolding look on his muzzle. "Can you just give me a little bit of space, Azizi? We've talked about this before," he snapped. "I come in alone, I'm the lead distraction so everyone can circle. Got it?"

The hyena named Azizi backed away, his long tongue licking his lips. "Okay, okay. Sorry, Kamari."

Kamari rolled his eyes. "Don't be sorry, just do it!"

Simba and Nala shared looks. They knew hyenas weren't the smartest animals around, but this Azizi seemed different altogether.

"Okay. But they are staying for dinner, right? That's why you asked them."

"I wasn't asking them to actually stay," Kamari growled.

"But you told them to stay," Azizi argued. "Why're you lying?"

"Because they're our dinner!" Kamari snapped, getting tired of Azizi's stupidity. "Understand?"

"Yeah, I got it. Makes sense," replied Azizi with a grin. "But just to be clear...they're staying, right?"

Kamari, who had smiled when Azizi seemed to get it, now snarled his frustration at him. Simba tried to find a way to sneak away with Nala and Zazu, if only Kamari and Azizi moved a little.

"HOLD IT!"

The new voice, a female, echoed in the chamber that the cubs were nearly backed into. Out strolled three more hyenas, the one in the middle the biggest hyena Simba had ever seen. She wasn't as big as Mufasa, of course, only around nearly as tall as Sarabi...but she had a mean look on her, from the scars on her body to the sneer on her muzzle.

"Well well, Banzai," growled the female with a grin to her right-hand hyena coming up beside her. "What do we have here?"

"I don't know, Shenzi," replied the male behind her, also grinning. "What do you think, Ed?"

The other male behind them didn't speak. He only giggled and cackled, a very insane look on his face.

"Yeah, that's what I was thinkin,'" Banzai remarked. "We got us a trio of trespassers!"

"And quite by mistake too," Zazu chuckled nervously. "We

really must go."

But before he could take off, Shenzi stomped on his tail feathers with her paw. "Whoa, hold on a minute," she said with a toothy grin. "I know you. You're Mufasa's little stooge."

Zazu pulled his tail feathers away from her. "I, Shenzi, am the king's majordomo."

"And that would make you..." Banzai asked, glaring at the cubs.

"The future king!" Simba piped up, trying to put on a brave face.

Shenzi chuckled, and the other hyenas followed suit. Their hideous cackles rang throughout the area and rattled off the bones. When they were finished, A jackal appeared. Her name is Reirei. Reiriei sneered, "Now this is something I waited for my whole life. What an unexpected treat to meet the son of a king."

Simba felt his fur bristle. Now he knew who Shenzi was; he had heard about her from his parents. She was the current leader of the hyenas, overthrowing her mother to become the leader of her clan. He even heard that she even fed her mother's head to her subordinates, but they could be rumors.

"Wait a second, the king?" Kamari asked, getting closer. "King, as in you-know-who?"

"Who rules you-know-where?" Azizi added.

"Yeah, Mufasa. But that big ol' kitty cat doesn't rule me,"

Shenzi overrode them. "In fact, he ain't rulin' no hyenas here. Answer me this, kid," she added to Simba, stepping closer. "Do you know what we do to kings who step outta their kingdom?"

Simba scoffed. "You can't do anything to me! I'm the future king!"

Shenzi stared down at Simba, and Simba really wished she would just go away. Then she looked around at her clan, cackling, "Y'all hear that? He's tellin' me what to do! He's got his daddy's spirit in him! I bet all that spirit tastes like chicken."

All of the other hyenas laughed as well, once again their hideous laughs ringing in Simba's ears. He was now slowly starting to regret coming to the elephant graveyard after all.

"They can't do anything to me anyway," Simba grumbled to himself, trying to stay confident.

"Actually, they can," replied Zazu. "We are on their territory."

"But Zazu, you told me that they're nothing but slobbery, mangy, stupid poachers."

Zazu chuckled nervously and whispered, "Ix-nay on the upid-stay..."

"WHO YOU CALLIN' UPID-STAY?!" Banzai snarled, getting close to Zazu.

Zazu squawked before facing the leader of the hyena clan. "Shenzi, you can't seriously be thinking of eating the prince!"

he pleaded. "They made a mistake, a truly horrible mistake! If you eat these two cubs, it will be a declaration of war!"

"Lions and hyenas have been feudin' ever since this world was created. Makes no difference to me," Reirei drawled, licking her chops. Shenzi replied to Reirei, "Now take it easy, Reirei. We'd love to have you stick around for dinner."

"Yeah! We'll have..." Banzai tried to think of a joke. "...whatever's lion around!"

This caused the other hyenas to laugh, Ed the loudest. Shenzi even joined in, saying, "Make mine a cub sandwich! What'cha think?!"

While the hyenas joked (Azizi joked while Kamari rolled his eyes), Simba and Nala tried slipping away. It didn't matter to the hyenas if they were children; they wanted blood, and the cubs wanted to get away. Zazu ushered them around the laughing hyenas, whispering to not make any noise while they left.

Just then, Ed started yipping and whining, pointing in a direction. "What, Ed? What is it?" Shenzi snapped.

"Hey, wait a minute," Banzai spoke up. His eyes spotted where the cubs and bird had been a minute ago. "Did we order this dinner to go?"

"No. Why?" Shenzi asked.

Banzai looked around until he spotted what he hoped to see: the cubs making a run for it. "'Cause there it goes!"

"Don't just stand there gawkin' into space, fools!" Reirei snapped, jumping to her paws. "Don't let 'em get away!"

They started to rush after the cubs, only for Zazu to fly down and peck at their heads with his beak, pulling at one of Shenzi's ears as well. He didn't get to fly away, however, for the hyenas pounced on him, knocking him down to the ground. Zazu was worried that they would try and eat him just as Scar tried to do a few months back.

However, they picked him up and brought him over to a small geyser. It was small enough to fit a meerkat or a bird of his size in. Before Zazu could fly away, Banzai grabbed him, chuckling.

"So the little majordomo bird went hippity-hop all the way to the Birdie Boiler," Banzai said, marching Zazu over to the geyser.

"Oh no! Not the Birdie Boilaaaaaaaaah!" Zazu started to cry out in horror.

It was too late. The hyenas and Jackals stuffed him into the geyser and waited until it erupted. Zazu was shot up into the sky with a scream, and the hyenas started laughing at such a sight. Even the more serious Kamari couldn't help but chuckle.

"HEY!" Simba and Nala had run back to try and rescue Zazu, the former glaring at the hyenas. "Why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

Shenzi snickered before walking over to Simba, towering over him. "Like...you?"

Now realizing again how small they were compared to the hyenas and jackals, Simba and Nala turned tail and ran. But the five hyenas ran after them, scaring them through steam vents and trying to bite at their heels. They climbed up a bone hill, trying to stay out of their reach, only to slip down. They slid down the length of a long backbone with huge ribs blocking their sides. Just as they were sure that they were safe, they fell off the backbone and landed on another pile of bones, and the hyenas were on their tails again. The cubs started to scramble up the bone hill as fast as they could, hearts pounding with terror.

All the while, Simba felt a combination of shame and fright mix together in his belly. He hadn't meant to get them into this mess, and he certainly did not plan on being a hyena's dinner. Those thoughts alone made him scramble to the top of the hill as best as he could.

Suddenly, a cry sounded out from behind Simba. Nala was sliding down the hill, right towards the hyenas' jaws. Simba leaped down the hill in several bounds and, when Shenzi was almost upon Nala, slashed her hard across the face with his claws. They fled, while Shenzi's sneer turned into a furious snarl, the claw marks on her muzzle starting to bleed. That prince was going to taste extra good once she caught him, for giving her these scars.

The hyenas gave chase again, and the cubs ended up running into a cave. They saw what they thought was an opening in the cave roof and climbed up towards it. But the bones beneath them gave way, and they fell to the cave floor with a thud. Now they were trapped by all five hyenas and nine jackals, flanked by the wall behind them and the wall of

fur and teeth in front of them.

"Here, kitty-kitty-kitty," Banzai said with a chuckle. Behind him, more hyenas than Simba could count had started clambering out of their dens to help surround the cubs.

Simba looked around at Nala, whose eyes were wide with pure fright, and it frightened him too. He realized that this whole adventure was all his fault. Then he decided that since he got himself and Nala in this mess, he was going to get them out...or at least die trying.

So Simba dug his claws into the rocky floor and did his best to try and roar. But all that came out was a mix of a little growl and a mewl. The hyenas took one look at him and then at each other before laughing altogether.

"Look at that!" Kamari jeered. "The future king indeed!"

"I'm really scared now," Azizi joined in, giggling like crazy. "Like...really REALLY scared!"

"That the best you got?" Shenzi scoffed. "Come on, prince. Do it again. I dare ya."

Simba dug in deep again and growled louder. Just then, a roar echoed in the elephant graveyard, drowning out Simba's own growl, and the hyenas and jackals spun as one to confront the intruder. Mufasa was charging his way through the crowd, roaring, snarling, and swiping his claws at them. Hyenas leaped at him to slow him down, and the ultimate king countered with his own teeth and claws.

Shenzi was the one fighting the most. The clan leader

pounced on Mufasa's back, trying to take a bite out of him, but Mufasa bucked her off. Once she was on the ground, the lion swiped his massive paw at her, his claws slashing at her foreleg. Shenzi snarled and backed away, licking the new wound on her leg. The other hyenas started to snarl in anger at this, only for Mufasa to roar "SILENCE!", and they fell quiet again.

"If you ever come near my son again..." Mufasa snarled.

Shenzi scoffed. "Yeah, I get it," she hissed through gritted teeth, licking at her wound. "I won't touch him again."

Mufasa nodded with a snort. "You've been warned, Shenzi. Now return to your den."

With a sneer, Shenzi heaved herself to her paws and started to walk away, Kamari quickly loping over to her side. Near the two of them, Azizi pretended to gasp with surprise. "Oh, that was his son? Hey, did you know that, Banzai?"

"Nah, I didn't know," Banzai lied. "You, Azizi?"

"No, of course not!" yelped Azizi.

Then they looked at Ed to help them out. "Ed?" they both prompted him.

Ed only nodded his head.

This only caused Mufasa to roar louder, the cave appearing to shake from his roar. Shenzi gave a growl for her hyenas to leave with her, and she gave the lions a contemptuous glare before she left. So the hyenas took their chance to leave,

filing into the deeper parts of the elephant graveyard, one by one. Once the hyenas were gone, Zazu flew over and gave Mufasa a grin and a nod.

But Mufasa met his smile with a glare, which made Zazu's smile disappear. "This is how you watch over my son?" he growled at the hornbill. "Letting him and Nala wander into danger?"

Zazu cringed and raised his wings up in defense. "Sire, it wasn't my fault. The cubs tricked me and - "

"I don't want to hear excuses," Mufasa snapped, raising a paw for silence. "As the adult in this situation, you should have known better than to let them fool you."

Zazu bowed his head in shame, and Simba himself felt a sting of shame pierce his heart. Mufasa's anger was like that of the burning sun. Simba felt guilty for getting Zazu into trouble, and he also felt ashamed for disobeying the adults in the first place.

"Dad, it really wasn't Zazu's fault," he tried saying. "I'm the one who - "

"You deliberately disobeyed me," Mufasa interrupted. He fixed Simba with such a stern glare that the cub couldn't finish.

"Dad...I'm sorry." he tried again.

Mufasa didn't respond to the apology. "Let's go home," he rumbled, and he started to walk ahead of the cubs.

Up ahead, Zazu flew after Mufasa, giving the cubs a look of pity. Simba kept his head down, ashamed and scared at the same time. A nudge from Nala made him look up as she whispered, "I thought you were pretty brave. Thanks for saving me."

Simba couldn't smile. He didn't deserve the praise she had given him. He had nearly gotten them killed, but he was also afraid of what his father would do. And that frightened him more than the hyenas did.

Not far away, as they left the elephant graveyard, Scar watched them go from inside a mastodon's skull. He scowled as Mufasa, his bratty nephew, and Nala walked away, unscathed; he had come to see if the hyenas and jackals had finished the job, only to witness this. Now he would have to go talk to them later on, to demand why they hadn't finished the job.

Chapter 5

Sunset had arrived by the time the lions and Zazu got back to the Pride Lands. Because of the light of the setting sun, the savannah was bathed in colors of golden, orange, and red. Many of the animals of the day would start retiring for the night, while the nocturnal animals began their night shift. Thus, sunset was usually Simba's favorite part of the day.

But not today. Mufasa marched ahead of the cubs, still furious with his son and majordomo; his anger hadn't left at all ever since they left the elephant graveyard. The cubs trailed behind, Simba still ashamed of himself and Nala not

sure how to comfort him. Zazu flew ahead, alternating between pity for the cubs and nervous about his king's anger.

"Hey Zazu?" Simba called up to the hornbill.

Zazu noticed him and flew down until he was right above Simba. "Yes, Simba?"

"I'm really sorry for treating you like that near the watering hole," Simba murmured. "And I'm really sorry I insulted you."

Zazu sighed and landed on Simba's back. "I forgive you. You're not the first cub to have said such things, and you definitely won't be the last," he said, sounding touched by Simba's apology. "Though I'm afraid I'm not the only one you have to apologize to. You've upset your father. But don't look worried, young master," he added, seeing the immense guilt on Simba's face. "The king does not stay angry forever. He is slow to anger and quick to love. He will forgive you if you are truly sorry."

Simba really wanted to apologize, and he was indeed very sorry, but how could he? He had broken his father's trust. He had even broken his promise to his uncle, to not go to the elephant graveyard.

"Zazu!" Mufasa called almost immediately.

As fast as he could, Zazu flew over until he landed in front of Mufasa. "Yes, Sire?" he asked meekly.

"Take Nala home," commanded Mufasa. He was not looking at Zazu or the cubs, instead looking opposite the setting sun. "I have to teach my son a lesson."

Hearing this, Simba crouched low in the grass until he was barely visible.

Then to Simba's surprise, Zazu defended him. "Don't be too hard on him. He apologized to me for causing trouble," he told Mufasa. "Why, I remember a cub - a certain headstrong cub - who was always getting into scrapes. Yet he achieved some prominence, did he not?"

Mufasa nodded. He would be a hypocrite to deny that he had done anything wrong as a cub. For the first time since leaving the elephant graveyard, some of his anger started to fade away, though it still lingered like a burn.

"You know me too well, Zazu," he murmured. "And I apologize for being rough with you earlier. You did your best with the cubs, and I couldn't ask for more from you." A slightly relieved Zazu nodded, showing that all was well between them. "But you do understand that discipline is important in raising a child. If I don't discipline him, he might not grow up to be a good king."

Zazu nodded, not wishing to argue anymore. He flew over to where the cubs stood, as Simba kept thinking of the punishment his father would give him. He had also heard of the discipline part and winced. Was Mufasa going to beat him?

"Come, Nala," Zazu told the female cub before turning to the prince. "Simba...good luck."

The prince could only look on helplessly as Nala started leaving for Pride Rock without him. Zazu took flight and flew

ahead of Nala, keeping an eye out for any danger coming their way. Nala glanced back at him over her shoulder one more time before running after Zazu.

"Simba!" Mufasa called from up ahead.

Simba winced and started to slink over to Mufasa. He didn't bother deliberately slowing down to stall his father, deciding to get it over with. As he walked, though, he stumbled literally across something and looked down.

It was one of Mufasa's pawprints, a huge print that could fit a newly hatched egret. The thought of following in his father's path made Simba's head swim with both shame and confusion. How could he follow in his pawprints if he kept messing up? With a sigh, Simba walked on until he sat beside Mufasa, daring to take a look upward.

For a while, Mufasa said nothing, closing his eyes and thinking. Then, at last, he opened his eyes and stared down at Simba with a stern face. "Simba, I am very disappointed in you."

"I know," Simba mewed sadly.

"You could have been killed," Mufasa went on, his voice rising in some emotion. "You deliberately disobeyed me, and what's worse, you put Nala in danger! Do you understand what's at stake? You have jeopardized the future of our pride."

At this, Simba began to sniffle and cry, knowing that Mufasa was right. He had put Nala in danger and nearly gotten her and himself killed, all to prove that he was mighty in his own right. He hadn't meant for that or endangering the pride.

"I was just trying to be brave like you," he whimpered. "I wanna be like you, Dad."

Mufasa sighed and thought for a moment. While he did indeed feel that he had to discipline his son, he knew that Simba really meant it when he was sorry. He was a lion that would slowly come to be angry, yet he was very quick to love. Simba, in the meantime, was scared that Mufasa would never want to speak to him again. For a moment, he wanted to beg Mufasa to say anything, just one word.

"I'm only brave when I have to be, when I have no other choice," Mufasa told his son, his voice having gotten calmer. "Simba, being brave doesn't mean you go looking for trouble."

"But you're not scared of anything," Simba said in surprise.

Mufasa blinked away the sadness from his eyes. "I was today."

Simba was amazed. He had never known that kings could get scared. "You were?"

"Yes," said Mufasa, lowering himself to look his son directly in the eyes. "I thought I might lose you."

Simba nodded. The bad feeling he had gotten in his heart and belly was now fading away. Mufasa wasn't angry with him anymore. Things were going to be okay now.

"I guess even kings get scared, huh?" Simba asked.

"Mm-hmm," his father replied, nodding. "More than you could ever know."

With a smirk, Simba leaned in. "But you know what?"

Mufasa smiled back. "What?"

"I think those hyenas were even scarder," Simba said with a snicker.

"That's because nobody messes with your dad!" Mufasa said, laughing and reaching over to him. "Come here, you!"

With a playful growl, he grabbed Simba and pulled him into a headlock, ruffling his head fur. Simba pretended to growl and struggle, laughing and reaching up to grab his mane. Mufasa jumped away, laughing as the two lions raced through the grass, sending up fireflies that glowed on the savannah grass. When Simba finally caught up, he pounced and grabbed a hold of Mufasa's ear with his teeth.

Finally, they stopped playing, panting from their exercise. Mufasa was laying down in the grass, paws tucked under him. Simba was resting on his mane, crawling up to look down at his father's face. All negative feelings he felt earlier were now gone.

"Dad?" he asked, which earned a good-natured grunt from Mufasa. "We're pals, right?"

Mufasa chuckled. "Right."

"And we'll always be together, right?" Simba pressed on.

Mufasa raised his head, leading to Simba sliding onto his broad shoulders. He frowned, not in anger, but in deep thought. How to break it to him but being gentle at the same time...

"Simba," he said finally, "let me tell you something that my father told me. Look at the stars." He lifted his head to the starry night sky, and Simba did the same. "The great kings of the past look down on us from those stars."

Simba rolled around until he rested in between Mufasa's forepaws. Above them, the starry sky expanded across the sky like falling snow, the moon shining bright upon them as well. "Really?"

Mufasa nodded. "Yes. So whenever you feel alone, just remember that those kings will always be there to guide you. And so will I." Then he looked down at Simba and said with a small sad smile, "They live in you, Simba, and they live in me as well. They're watching over everything we see. In every creature, in every star, and in your reflection."

"That sounds pretty cool," Simba remarked and flicked his tail. "Where'd you get that from?"

"It was part of a song my mother taught me and your uncle Scar, when we were your age," said Mufasa, looking back up to the night sky. "There are two variations of that song, to show that even those who are gone will always be with us."

There was indeed a sad tone in Mufasa's voice. It almost made Simba sad that he didn't know something that his father did.

Tilting his head back and forth, Simba tried seeing any starry lions leaping through the sky. "But I can't see them, Dad," he murmured.

"Keep looking, son," Mufasa rumbled with a smile. "Keep looking. They're always there."

So father and son watched the stars together. Simba nestled in close to Mufasa's mane. He trusted his father, but more importantly, he loved him. All that mattered now was that they were under the stars, watching them together. And they would be together forever.

Back at Pride Rock, Sarabi paced near the cave. Nala and Zazu had already gotten back before Simba, but they didn't mention where exactly Simba was. From what Zazu told her, Mufasa was having a word with the prince. Still, that didn't keep a mother from worrying for her son, and Sarabi was no exception.

Then she spotted a pair of shadows coming closer to Pride Rock, one big and one little. As she approached, she breathed a sigh of relief. It was Mufasa leading Simba back home, both of them looking sleepy yet happy. They slowly approached the foot of Pride Rock, and she descended down the rocky path to greet her mate and son.

"I'm glad you brought your father back home," Sarabi greeted Simba, giving him a gentle lick before giving her mate a teasing look. "It's way past his bedtime as well as yours."

Mufasa grinned. "We've had a little adventure today, that's all."

Sarabi perked up with interest. "Oh really? Would you like to tell me about it, Simba?"

At first, Simba felt his heart race and his paws freeze to the ground. Mufasa had been angry with him before he had become calm. Would his mother be the same way too? And would Mufasa really tell Sarabi about what had happened today?

Then he saw the look Mufasa gave him as he looked around. It was a small smile, to reassure Simba that things were going to be all right.

With a small nod, Mufasa turned back to answer Sarabi. "Let's just say that Simba was out claiming more territory for the Pride Lands," he rumbled.

"Yeah!" Simba chirped, but he broke off with a yawn and a stretch. "Boy, am I sleepy!"

His parents chuckled before Mufasa sidled up to Sarabi. "I'll tell you more about it tomorrow morning," he whispered to his mate. "Just before I leave for the dawn patrol."

Sarabi nodded, and she turned her attention to Simba. "Come along to bed, dear," she called.

Simba nodded and scampered over to his mother. When they got into the cave, they noticed that the lionesses had cleared a path for them to get to their resting spot. They got to their sleeping spot, where Sarabi flopped down onto her side, and Simba nestled close to her body.

"Good night, Simba," Mufasa told his son, giving him a gentle

lick on the head.

"'Night, Dad," Simba mewed.

But it was just when his father was walking was did Simba remember something. He quickly got up and raced towards Mufasa, leaving Sarabi watching them with half-tired eyes. As Mufasa was about to ask what was wrong, Simba reached up to rub against his mane.

"Love ya, Dad," he said as he looked up at Mufasa.

Mufasa leaned down with a smile and nuzzled him as well. "Love you too, son."

Back in the elephant graveyard, Shenzi was livid. Mufasa had dared to invade her territory, and for what? Two tasty lion cubs that shouldn't be in her territory in the first place? She had every right to eat those cubs for being on her territory, and yet she was the one to come out wounded, while Mufasa and Simba waltzed back to the Pride Lands. That thought was enough to make her tear her own fur off.

She had been discussing plans with Kamari and Azizi on what to do next. While Banzai and Ed were her best friends, she relied on Kamari and Azizi for carrying out plans. Now she left them alone to argue while she tended to her wound, listening to them from a ledge above them. As for the den they lived in, it was the biggest den in the elephant graveyard, enough to fit a dozen hyenas, jackals, marabous, and vultures.

When it came to rest from their battle, Kamari walked over to sit closer to the wall. "Next time Mufasa comes here, I'll teach him a lesson he's never gonna forget," he snapped, licking at

a wound.

"Come on, Kamari, what can you teach him?" Azizi asked brightly. "He knows a lot of stuff. He's a wise king."

Kamari rolled his eyes and sighed. "I wasn't gonna actually teach him anything, dummy," he retorted. "Now go away and give me some space."

Still not getting what Kamari was saying, Azizi pressed on. "We can teach him how to chase down the sick and injured," he suggested, smiling. "Or we can teach him about how we raise our cubs."

"What I meant was," Kamari growled, trying not to lose patience with Azizi, "Was that Mufasa was being unfair for prancing in and beating us up on our own land. Those lion cubs wandered into our territory, so that gave us the right to eat them. Mufasa's gonna pay for this."

"Okay, I get it now," said Azizi, sitting down next to Kamari. Suddenly, Kongoti came in. He was the only marabou stork in the elephant graveyard. Mzingo squawked, "Just a question, though: what'll we make him pay with? A wildebeest? I can go for some wildebeest. Can we have some wildebeest?"

Kamari slapped his own forehead with a wing, grumbling to himself. When he spoke aloud, he snapped while walking away, "Now I know you're doing this on purpose. I need my personal space. Lay anywhere in here, but not near me."

Azizi got up as well and walked...right after Kamari and sat next to him again. With an anguished growl, Kamari muttered something about Azizi being spiteful this time around.

Not too far away, Banzai was grumbling a lot louder than Kamari. "Man, that lousy Mufasa!" he snarled. "I won't be sittin' for a week!"

He tried scooting again, but it didn't work. Ed just giggled at the sight of the claw marks on his friend's rear.

"It's not funny, Ed," snapped Banzai.

Ed clamped his paws over his mouth as if to stop himself from laughing. But he couldn't hold it anymore, and he let loose a very loud cackle.

"Hey, shut up!" Banzai growled.

But Ed kept laughing. With a snarl, Banzai pounced on Ed, and the two were now wrestling on the cave floor. Kamari glanced up from laying down, giving them a scolding glare, while Azizi tried sidling up to him again.

Shenzi rolled her eyes. She appreciated having Banzai and Ed around, ever since they were all pups together. But when they fought each other for stupid reasons, it started to get annoying. She was close to them, yet they were pretty much silly, while Kamari and Azizi weren't as close but much more competent.

"Will you knock it off?!" Shenzi snapped at the two males.

The two broke away from their fight, leaving Ed to start gnawing on his own leg. "He started it!" Banzai whined, pointing at Ed.

Shenzi climbed down from the rock, Kamari, and Azizi at her heels. "Look at you guys! No wonder we're danglin' at the bottom of the food chain."

"Man, I hate danglin,'" griped Banzai while drooling a bit.

"You know, if it weren't for those high and mighty lions, we'd be runnin' the joint," Shenzi continued.

Banzai shook his head as if he had gotten wet. "Man, I hate lions!"

"They're so pushy…" Shenzi started.

"…and hairy…" added Banzai.

"…and stinky…" giggled Azizi.

"And man, are they…" Banzai added again.

"UUUUUUGLY!" all three of them said, ending with insane laughter.

But suddenly, a new voice echoed in the cave. "Surely, we lions are not all that bad?" the voice said, smooth yet slick.

The hyenas spun around. From the frame that filled their cave entrance, they at first thought that Mufasa had come back. But this lion was skinnier, and more frail compared to the more powerful Mufasa. When the lion stepped in, he indeed had darker fur and a black mane, and one did not simply forget the scar over his left eye.

Reirei caught something in her mouth, it was the blue and

white leg of a zebra.

Banzai, Ed, and Azizi looked at the zebra leg with grins and lolling tongues, but Shenzi was on alert, Kamari by her side. Even though she and Scar were civil towards each other, their alliance was on shaky ground. Banzai, Ed, and Azizi seemed to like Scar the most, but Shenzi herself and Kamari were wary around the king's brother. If he tried anything against the hyenas, he would become the snack that Prince Simba should have been.

"I thought it was somebody important," Shenzi snarked.

"Yeah, like Mufasa," said Banzai, his voice dripping with a dislike for the king.

"Tell me about it," said Shenzi. "I hear that name, and I shudder."

With a grin, Banzai exclaimed, "Mufasa!"

This made Shenzi shiver, her dark fur ruffling. "Do it again," she told Banzai with a grin.

"Mufasa, Mufasa, Mufasa!" Banzai chanted some more. "Mufasa, Mufasa, MUFASAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Shenzi rolled down on the ground, yelping and giggling, "It tingles me!" Azizi and Ed leaned against each other, laughing loudly as if they had heard the funniest joke ever. The jackals, marabous, and vultures joined in the roar of laughter.

While this went on, Scar shook his head. He was allied with some of the hyenas here, but he didn't like their antics at all.

They were sometimes no better than a lion cub. And Shenzi, a leader herself, could easily be fooled into acting so immature. "I'm surrounded by idiots," he muttered.

"You and me," Kamari agreed, having heard Scar.

"Not you, Scar," piped up Banzai as he, Shenzi, and Azizi stopped laughing. "You're our buddy, our pal."

"You're one of us," Azizi said with a big goofy grin. "You're more hyena than we are!"

Somehow, that sounded like an insult to Scar. "Charmed," he drawled.

"That's why I like him," Azizi told Banzai and Ed. "He's not a king, but he's got our backs. Or is that necks?"

Banzai snickered. "Got that right, Azizi. Hey, Scar!" he barked to the lion in question. "You got anything to eat, ol' buddy, ol' pal?"

Scar merely glanced down at the meat, which the hyenas looked at like they were starving dogs. After the paltry attempt at the cubs' lives, he was surprised that they were surprised that they're getting anything to eat.

"I don't think you five deserve this," Scar told the hyenas, picking up the meat. "You have stripped your own land dry with your greedy gullets. How do you explain living in this countryside of bones? Yet I practically gift-wrapped those two cubs for you, and you couldn't even dispose of them."

"We can always eat you instead," Kamari replied, giving Scar

a contemptuous scowl. "Seriously, this can be the first time we've ever tasted a lion."

Azizi licked his lips, drooling. "Yeah. Some lion tenders sound good right about now."

Reirei rolled her eyes and dropped the meat in front of them, and she climbed onto a nearby rock to watch them eat. Immediately, the hyenas were on the zebra's leg, eating all they could. Gulps and chewing and growls echoed in the cave as they devoured the zebra meat, briefly nipping each other to get the choice cuts.

"You know," Shenzi said, her mouth full, "it's not like they were alone, Scar."

"Yeah, what're we supposed to do?" Banzai added, swallowing his mouthful of zebra meat. "Kill Mufasa?"

Scar grinned. "Precisely."

Reirei shouted. "That's it! You're going to kill Mufasa!"

The five hyenas shared glances before looking back at Scar. Was he being serious?

"Look, it's simple," said Scar, climbing down the rock towards the hyenas. "I know how tiresome it can be, living in this graveyard. Why eat one meal when you can eat for the rest of your lives?"

Again, the hyenas shared confused glances. Shenzi stepped out from around the stripped zebra bone until she stood face-to-face with Scar. "Yeah? What can you offer us, huh?"

"I can offer you a place where your hunger will be completely satisfied," said Scar. "A land where everything the light touches is yours for the taking. That's why I want you to be prepared."

The hyenas shared glances, and then they laughed. Shenzi almost joined them. Scar was no better than his brother, waltzing into the place like he owned it and lording his superiority over them. But a chance to get a lot of food seemed too good to be true...in fact, it was literally a little too good to be true.

"You for real?" Shenzi snapped. "The Pride Lands ain't yours to give away for free."

Kamari stood beside Shenzi, nodding. "Yeah, Mufasa controls those hunting grounds. That's why we aren't allowed there now and why he chases us off."

"And that's why we're waiting for the death of the king," Scar replied. "Once he dies, I will allow you to cross over freely into the Pride Lands unchallenged."

"Why, is he sick?" Azizi asked curiously.

Scar scoffed. Sometimes, these hyenas really were stupid. "No, fool, we're going to kill him."

"Great idea," Shenzi piped up with a snicker. "Who needs a king?"

Together, Banzai, Reirei, Shenzi, and Azizi started dancing in a circle. "No king, no king, la la la la la la!" they sang, while

Kamari rolled his eyes.

"Idiots!" Scar roared. "There will be a king! I will be king!"

Before anyone could say anything else, Shenzi got serious again. "Get real, Scar," she growled. "Lions and hyenas have been fightin' ever since the dawn of time. They steal each other's kills and kill each other's cubs. You'd never fight on our side!"

Scar shrugged, not wanting to argue. "It is true. But the truth is, my kind hates your kind even more. They are too prejudiced to look beyond their own noses and care for the other predators that share their lands," he preached. "But where others may describe greed as a sin, I see it as a virtue. I call it ambition. Mufasa has always shown too much restraint when it comes to hunting. Stick with me, and when I become king, you will never go hungry again. The mighty will claim what is rightfully theirs, to take whatever they want. Because a hyena's belly is never full."

Shenzi looked away from Scar and shared glances with her clan. What Scar was saying really did sound like a dream come true. All the food they could eat, with no one to stop them. It sounded like paradise to the hyenas.

But then again, it sounded crazy. Mufasa was a brute to their kind, but he wasn't stupid. While the hyenas had numbers on their side, Mufasa had the lionesses' skill and strength. It didn't matter if the hyenas outnumbered the lions, they themselves were outmatched.

"How could you think that this'll work?" she questioned. "Mufasa's far too powerful to challenge."

Kamari nodded. "Yeah. He thrashed us pretty well when he rescued those cubs." He pawed at his badly torn ear. "I think I'm still feeling it."

"Speaking of cubs, my brother has a weakness that he has never had before," Scar pressed on, ignoring the hyenas' antics. "It is a weakness that clouds his judgment."

"Simba?" Shenzi guessed. She used a paw to rub over the claw marks a certain cub had made on her muzzle. "You mean that spunky prince kid who scratched me?"

Scar nodded. "Indeed. We can be rid of him too."

Shenzi slowly nodded, her eyes meeting Scar. Maybe Scar's idea didn't sound that bad after all. If she and her clan helped in offing Mufasa and Simba, then she could make sure that Scar would keep his end of the bargain. They would never starve again.

"All right then," she declared, holding her head up. "We're in. What d'you want us to do?"

"Be prepared for the chance of a lifetime," Scar replied, climbing to the top of the tallest rock. "Be prepared for the coup of the century, for the murkiest scam. And prepare for this revolution." The hyenas nodded together, now at full attention. "Now...are your teeth and ambitions bared?"

All five hyenas nodded and bared their teeth. Out of the shadows loomed more hyenas, even more than the ones that chased the cubs, baring their teeth as well. They were indeed enough to outnumber the lionesses at Pride Rock.

Scar smiled, his dreams of becoming king closer than ever before. "Good. Because my teeth and ambitions are bared as well." With a roar that echoed in the cave, he bellowed, "Be prepared!"

Chapter 6

The next morning, Simba woke up, not completely bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. He and Mufasa had stayed out later than they usually did, coming back for a late meal and a quick bath before going to bed. So when Simba woke up, he was still trying to rub the sleep out of his eyes.

Breakfast was served, a fresh meal of Cape buffalo. Those huge beasts were a challenge to take down; even the most skilled hunters in the pride could easily get gored or trampled by a buffalo. As he ate, he caught snippets of the lionesses talking to each other.

"That was quite the adventure Simba and Nala had yesterday," Nala's mother Sarafina remarked. "Imagine, straying so far into hyena territory!"

Simba felt the skin under his fur grow hot. Mufasa must have told Sarabi about their son's adventure, and she spread it out to the rest of the pride. He really wished that less animals were that nosy.

One of the younger lionesses, who had gotten her ear nicked from the buffalo's horns earlier, scoffed. "If you ask me, Simba wasn't punished enough," she snapped. "He even put

your daughter in danger, for kings' sake. What kind of father is Mufasa, to refuse to discipline a child?"

"Certainly not the way you'd do it, Zira," Sarafina retorted, her voice now stern. "From what I've heard, Simba was indeed sorry for what he did, and he and Nala are safe and sound. That's all that matters."

"What matters more is that he's been a troublemaker," replied Zira, giving Simba a nasty sideways look. "For once, I wouldn't blame Mufasa for still being angry with him."

The good feeling Simba felt from the night before faded, replaced by worry. What if Zira was right? Was Mufasa still mad at him for all that? He had already apologized to him and Nala, but what if it wasn't good enough? Now his appetite was gone, so he slunk away without letting Sarafina or Zira noticing him.

Once he climbed down to the bottom of Pride Rock, Simba went to find Mufasa to spend more time with him, and perhaps apologize some more. Unfortunately, he heard from Zazu that Mufasa had already set off before breakfast, to settle a dispute between two banded mongoose families, as well as patrol his kingdom's borders. So he decided to rest on the rocks below, to avoid the judgmental stares from the other lionesses.

As he prepared to lay down, he heard a familiar voice drawl, "Tough luck this morning, eh?"

Simba glanced up to see Scar gazing down at him, green eyes unreadable. As for Scar himself, he had come to Simba not to comfort him but to spring his plan into action.

"Dad was upset with me last night," replied Simba. Still is, he thought with a shudder, remembering what Zira had said. He was glad that he and Mufasa spent a little father-son moment together, but the good feeling was gone. He really hoped that he could find the perfect way to make up for what he did.

"I think I have the perfect idea on how to make up for it," replied Scar with a smile. "Whatever he's mad at you about, it's a gift that will make him forget it ever happened."

Simba tilted his head and leaped down from the rock. "But he's the king. What can I give him?"

"Your roar," said Scar, not hesitating with his answer. "Why don't you come with me? I'll show you what I mean."

It did sound exciting for Simba. "But I gotta ask permission from Mom first," he reminded his uncle. "I can't go out on my own."

Scar rolled his eyes, but he covered it up with a nod. "Very well then. Do hurry up, though. The day's not getting any younger, you know."

He waited by his den while Simba ran off to ask his mother if he could leave. A moment or two passed before he came racing back. She had given him permission after all, and uncle and nephew headed off towards the savannah of the Pride Lands.

The two walked side-by-side, taking in the nature around them. Simba was eager to talk to other animals, to tell them about how he would spend the day with his uncle. He even

wanted to see if Beshte, the young hippo, would play. Scar, meanwhile, did not want to stop to take it all in. The longer Simba got distracted by the things around him, the less time he would have for his plan.

Soon, they arrived at a gorge, its steep walls reaching up to the blue sky. There wasn't much shade anywhere, but at least the lizards and snakes would find cracks in the gorge walls to rest in.

Scar walked up to a rock with a tree overhanging ahead. "Now you wait here, on this rock," he instructed Simba. "If you give your father enough of a good gift, he may have a marvelous surprise for you."

Simba got excited right away. Like lots of other cubs, he liked surprises. "What is it?" he asked, scrambling up the rock.

"If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise, now would it?"

"But if you tell me, I'll still act surprised."

Scar chuckled. "Oh-ho, you are such a naughty boy!"

"Come on, Uncle Scar," Simba pleaded.

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no," Scar said repeatedly. "This is just for you and your daddy. You know, a sort of...father-son...thing." A few awkward seconds passed before he spoke again. "Well! I'd better go get him."

He started to leave, and Simba tried going after him. "I'll go with you - "

"No!" Scar snapped, but he quickly regained his composure by chuckling. "Hehe...no. Just stay on this rock. You wouldn't want to end up in another mess like you did with the hyenas."

Simba's ears drooped. He had hoped that the news wouldn't spread, but news in the Pride Lands spread as quickly as wildfire. "You know about that?"

"Simba, Simba," Scar cooed, "everybody knows about that."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes. Lucky Daddy was there to save you, eh?" Scar replied with a smile. "Oh, and just between us, you might want to work on that little roar of yours."

Ears perked, Simba sat straight up. "My roar?"

"Yes, I've heard about your attempt to roar. I have said that I found a way for you to do it better, and perhaps this gorge can help." Scar looked around the walls, looking wistful. "This gorge is where all lions come to find their roar."

Simba looked around the gorge in awe. "All lions...even my dad?"

"Oh yes, even Mufasa," replied Scar. "He and I came here when we were your age, and our father was testing his roar. Your father refused to leave until his roar could be heard above the rim."

"All the way up there?" Simba asked, following his uncle's gaze.

Scar nodded. "Yes. That's when you know you've found it. With a little practice, you'll never be called a cub again. When I was your age, I was teased for not roaring loud, even though I led the Lion Guard as the Fiercest. But lo and behold, I eventually got my roar to reach the rim."

Simba had heard of the Lion Guard, a band of five lions that helped the royal family defend the Pride Lands. They were brave, fierce, strong, fast, and keenest of sight. Even if Simba was not to be in the Guard since he had no siblings, he wanted to be all five of those, just like his father. The leader was even blessed with a power called the Roar of the Elders, and he recalled hearing stories of how Scar was the leader of his own Lion Guard.

And to demonstrate, Scar lifted his head and let out a roar. It wasn't as impressive as Mufasa's roar, but it did reach the rim of the gorge, just as he and Mufasa had done as cubs.

Then there was when Scar mentioned 'never be called a cub again'. Simba realized that this was the perfect gift for Mufasa. If he let his father know that he learned his lesson and found his roar, he would be proud of him.

"I can do it," Simba boasted confidentially. "Watch this!"

He opened his mouth to roar, but all that came out was a mew. It barely even echoed on the canyon walls. Simba flattened his ears in disappointment.

"You'll get there, Simba. It just takes time and practice," said Scar, patting Simba on the shoulder. He stepped away from the rock and started padding away. "I'll come check on you later and get your surprise ready."

Simba nodded. "Dad will be so proud of me, huh?"

With a smirk, Scar replied, "Oh yes, he will be. It's a gift he'll never forget."

He had just walked several feet away when Simba had another question. "Hey, Uncle Scar! Will I like the surprise?"

"Simba, it's to die for," was all Scar said before leaving.

As he watched Scar, Simba sat back down on the rock, eager to wait for the surprise from Mufasa. He made sure to sit under the shade of tree; as the dry season was slowly going to arrive, it was more important than ever to find the best shade.

Not far away, the five hyenas watched the wildebeests from a rock. The massive herd was just going to their grazing grounds above the gorge, stopping to graze and take care of their babies. Scar had told them where the wildebeest migrated, and they could even snag themselves a dead wildebeest for their hard work.

All of a sudden, Banzai's stomach growled. Shenzi turned to him, snapping, "Shut up, will ya?"

"I can't help it. I'm starving!" Banzai growled. "I gotta have a wildebeest!"

"No. Stay put," retorted Shenzi. "Now shut up and wait."

"Can't I pick off the little sick ones?" Banzai pleaded.

But Shenzi was not going to have any of it. She rounded on Banzai, giving him an icy glare. "No. We'll wait for the signal from Scar."

"I'm with Banzai on this one, Shenzi," Azizi whimpered. "Can we eat the baby wildebeest? I'm hungry."

Kamari sighed. "You're just going to have to wait. I'm hungry too, but we have a job to do first."

Shenzi didn't answer. She had suddenly looked upwards to a ledge just above the wildebeest, her eyes narrowed. On that ledge, Scar had made his appearance. When he spotted the hyenas, he gave a nod before leaving.

"There he is," Shenzi announced to the hyenas. "Let's go."

So she and her fellow hyenas slunk through the grass towards the wildebeest herd. They split off into different directions, to corral the herd together once the plan went off. As a wildebeest and her calf came grazing together, Kamari sprang at them with a snarl, teeth bared. The mother and her calf cried out, and the herd looked up while the hyenas flanked them from behind and to the sides. With a bellow of fear, they began to run, right for the gorge. The hyenas chased them and snapped at their heels, Shenzi nearly giving one a broken leg in the process with her powerful jaws.

They watched the wildebeests stampede into the gorge from a higher ledge. If they were successful, Scar would get his throne, and the hyena clan would get their free meals.

Back in the canyon, Simba was already getting bored. He tried batting around rocks, but it was no fun with just one

player. He sharpened his claws on the tree to keep himself focused on his father's surprise. He even tried catching his own tail, though he failed to see the appeal. Little roar, he scoffed to himself. He would make up with his dad and show his uncle that he could roar.

He was about to fall asleep when a chameleon came walking out, eyes darting left and right on their own as its skin slowly changed to brown. It flicked out its tongue and caught a dragonfly, bringing it to its mouth and chomping on it. Simba smiled and crouched; perhaps this chameleon would be the perfect practice target for his roar.

He gave a growl as the chameleon walked by. The lizard merely looked at him and walked on. Simba tried a second time, this time a little more drawn out. As with last time, it just kept walking. Finally, Simba went up right behind it and let out a loud yowl, scaring the chameleon into running. As he did, his growl echoed off the gorge walls like he was in a cave. The chameleon suddenly turned back to green and darted to a crack in the wall, leaving Simba briefly confused. But the chameleon didn't matter right now.

I did it! Simba thought with glee. My roar reached the rim! Wait till Dad hears that!

Suddenly, the earth started to rumble beneath his paws. Simba was confused; had his roar meant to do that? Were roars supposed to make the earth shake? Then he looked to the sky at the rim of the gorge; it seemed to be getting darker. Perhaps it was a storm coming earlier?

But then he saw the figures of horned and hoofed animals starting to run down the ledges leading into the gorge. It was

no thunderstorm. It was a wildebeest herd, a massive one, stampeding into the gorge. Simba stood there for a moment, frightened and unable to figure out what to do.

Then as the wildebeests got closer, Simba did the only thing he could do. He ran.

It had been a very busy morning for Mufasa. During his patrol, he had to sort out a feud between two banded mongoose families and got sidelined by howling wolves, a roaring tiger, and an angry juvenile male gorilla. Other than that, the morning was nice, and Mufasa allowed himself to take a break. The sun warmed his golden fur and reddish mane, but it wouldn't take long until the sun would get even more unbearable.

He definitely remembered the elephant graveyard mishap just yesterday. While Mufasa had been disappointed in Simba for going there, he couldn't stay mad at his son; as many others had said about him, he was slow to anger and very quick to love. He had hoped that Simba liked looking up at the stars of his ancestors, just as his own father - King Ahadi - had done as well.

As he was climbing the slope, Zazu flew down to rest on his shoulder. "Look, Sire!" he announced. "The herds are on the move."

The king followed Zazu's gaze out towards the gorge. Just not too long ago, the wildebeest herds had moved to their summer grounds. It was too soon for them to turn back like this. "That's odd," he murmured to himself.

"Mufasa!" Scar was scrambling up the rock, looking

frightened. He had burst out from the bushes below the rock to catch up with his brother. "Come quick! Stampede! In the gorge! Simba's down there!"

"Simba?" Mufasa asked, frightened. Whatever else he had planned, it paled compared to what he just learned. "He's in danger? What was Simba doing down there, Scar?!"

"I was taking a walk with him, and helping him find a way to make up with you," Scar panted, sounding frantic. "When I got to the top of the gorge, the stampede had begun. I couldn't go down there in time, so I had to find you."

Mufasa shook his head. "We can't stand here talking. My son's in danger! Come!"

"I'll help find him in the stampede, Sire!" piped up Zazu, taking off.

So Mufasa took off running towards the gorge as fast as he could go, Scar on his heels. Above their heads, Zazu flew ahead of them, flapping his wings as fast as he could.

Simba ran faster than he had ever run before, even more so than when the hyenas were chasing him and Nala. That was nothing compared to over a million wildebeests thundering into the gorge and stampeding towards him. If he ever got out of this alive, he would never leave Pride Rock again.

As he ran, he noticed a small dead tree up ahead. It wouldn't protect him much from the stampede, having been dead for a long time, but he would be out of their way for the moment. Once he reached it, he took a flying leap and sank his claws into the bark, scrambling up the best he could. Simba

climbed to the top and clung on for dear life, watching the stampede race below.

Then he spotted Zazu. The hornbill was flying far above the stampede, looking left and right. When he found Simba on the dead tree, he flew down to the prince.

"Zazu, help me!" Simba cried out in fright, yelping as a wildebeest crashed into the tree.

"Your father's on his way, Simba!" Zazu called in reply. "Hold on, and don't let go! Help is coming!"

"Hurry!" screamed Simba. Zazu was here to help; if he told him to hold on, he would definitely hold on.

Zazu felt his heartbreaking, watching the young cub trying to hold on. It was true that Simba had given him a lot of trouble, but he wanted nothing more now than to fly down and rescue the prince. But he lacked the strength and agility to do so.

As he flew on, he noticed Mufasa and Scar coming to a stop at a ledge, looking left to right frantically for Simba. Zazu flew over to Mufasa, shouting, "There! He's over there! On that tree!"

Mufasa followed his gaze, frightened. Then he spotted Simba dangling and trying to cling to the bark. "HOLD ON, SIMBA!" he bellowed.

As another wildebeest hit the dead tree, Mufasa jumped down the ledges until he was at the edge of the stampede. He took a deep breath and leaped into the fray. The last of him Scar and Zazu could see was him racing along the outer

band before plunging through the herd.

"I'm coming Simba! Hold on!" shouted Mufasa running down the gorge.

"I'll help them, Zazu! You get the pride! Go!" said Scar. As it did, Zazu flew off to get the entire lioness pride.

Meanwhile, Mufasa ran a bit before turning and running the opposite way. He ran as fast as he could, so fast that he even crashed into an oncoming wildebeest. The animal stumbled before getting back up and joining its herd.

Then, as he rounded a bend, he noticed the dead tree that Zazu had told him about. Simba was clinging to a high branch, looking even more scared than when he was in the elephant graveyard. With a grunt, Mufasa shouldered his way through the wildebeests until he arrived at the foot of the tree, rearing up to get to his son.

"Dad!" Simba exclaimed, relief washing over his face.

"Simba!" Mufasa called, clinging to the tree with his claws. "Come to me, son! Jump!"

But before Simba could reply, Mufasa heard a nasty crack ripple through the bark. The wildebeest had charged into the dead tree so hard that it snapped. Simba was flung through the air, screaming, and the fear of losing his son swiftly carried Mufasa into action. He jumped up and caught Simba in time before he could be trampled underneath the thundering hooves. With his son in his jaws, the king tried to maneuver his way out of the stampede, leaping this way and that.

Scar was watching them from above. The plan was working well so far. The hyenas had succeeded in doing this task, and he would make sure they were rewarded. But for now, he had to keep his eye on his brother and son.

Back in the stampede, Mufasa crashed into another stampeding wildebeest, dropping Simba. Once again, Simba was left alone in the middle of the stampede. The wildebeests didn't seem to notice or care that a lion cub was lost and scared and trying to get out. To his relief, Mufasa came running over and picked him up, making a break for it when a brief opening appeared. He leaped up the ledge above the stampede and gently dropped Simba off there, nuzzling him. Simba almost smiled; they were both going to be okay.

That is, until another wildebeest came charging. It crashed headfirst into Mufasa's flank, and Mufasa was thrown back by the charge and flung back into the stampede.

"DAD!" Simba shouted. But his mew was barely heard above the roar of the stampede. He tried looking for his father beneath the hooves, but he didn't find anything except more hooves. A pang of fear made him flatten his ears; was Mufasa being trampled right now?

And then, moments later, Mufasa emerged. He leaped out of the stampede with a roar, clinging to the rocky wall with all of his claws. While he started climbing, Simba looked around to find a place to meet him at. He waited until Mufasa was out of sight before climbing up his own way. He would meet Mufasa at whatever side he would appear.

Back with Mufasa, the great lion king struggled to get his grip

on the rocky wall. He kept his claws out as he climbed, lest he would slip and slowly fall back into the stampede. It didn't matter that he was exhausted and battered; what mattered the most was that his son needed to be safe.

He had just reached the edge of the cliff when he spotted someone watching him from that ledge. It was Scar, green eyes unreadable and whiskers twitching.

"Scar!" Mufasa called, scrabbling on the cliff face. "Brother...help me...!"

For a moment, Scar said nothing. He looked down at Mufasa as if he was a stranger, not his own flesh and blood. Panting, Mufasa tried his best to haul himself up to his brother's side. Please, Scar, he begged silently. I need your help.

Then Scar moved...and sank his claws into Mufasa's paws. Mufasa roared in surprise and pain, and Scar took the chance to lean in, seizing the chance to use a claw to drag it across Mufasa's left eye. Taking in the shock and horror in his brother's eyes (the new scar on Mufasa's face slightly seeping blood), he leaned down and whispered four words into his ear:

"Long live the king."

And with that, he let go and flung Mufasa off the cliff. He felt cold satisfaction run through his veins as he watched his brother scream and fall to his death, and he welcomed it.

In the meantime, Simba was climbing up the rocks, to try and find his father. Fear pushed him onward, and fueled his heart like blood pumping into a cheetah's veins. He didn't care

anymore if he didn't get a surprise; all that mattered was that he and Mufasa would get out of this mess together, alive and well.

The last time he saw Mufasa, he was climbing up higher and higher, toward a ledge. Simba felt his heart beat with relief. They were going to get out after all. It was going to be all okay. He climbed up higher until he came to a safer ledge, where he could get to see the gorge below. Just a little bit more, and...

But when he looked outward, his optimism turned into sheer horror. Mufasa - the lion who was believed to be powerful, his father - was now falling to his death, screaming and roaring.

"NOOOOOOO!" Simba screamed, but it was too late. Mufasa ended up disappearing under thousands of pounding hooves, his roars cut off by the thunder of the stampede.

Down below, the stampede was now starting to fade away. The last of the wildebeests were picking up the pace, sending up clouds of dust in the air. Once the last of the wildebeests were gone, Simba climbed down into the gorge to look for his father.

While the herd was no longer in the gorge, the dust still hung in the air. Hoofprints littered the ground like someone had dropped rocks onto the earth from on high. Simba darted around, trying to find the spot where his father had fallen. He mistook rocks, mounds of dirt, and even a few dead wildebeests for his father.

"DAD!" he yelled, his voice echoing around the walls. As he had yelled, he accidentally gulped in some dust and coughed.

Suddenly, footsteps started sounding out, making Simba's head turn. "Dad?" he asked hopefully.

But all that appeared was a lone wildebeest, galloping down the path that the many wildebeest took. It made a sharp turn to run around a large mound on the ground and disappeared. Simba gasped when he realized that this mound had fur, running over...and stopped when he realized who that animal was.

Mufasa was there, all right. He was laying on his side, unmoving and not breathing. His eyes were closed, his whiskers were bent out of shape, and his fur and mane were ragged and patchy. Drying blood coated his golden fur, some from cuts on his sides and paws, and others from bruises that had been scratched open.

"Dad?" Simba mewled. He walked over and rubbed his head against Mufasa's mane, but he didn't stir. "Dad, come on, you gotta get up. Dad..." His voice cracked as he reared up to shake him awake. "...we gotta go home."

He tugged on his father's ear, just as he had done to wake him up before. This time, however, Mufasa wasn't getting up. Tears welled up in Simba's eyes. He wanted this to be a nightmare to wake up from, but this was real. His father was still lying motionless in the gorge. It can't be...

With a sob, Simba screamed to the sky, "HEEELLLLP! Somebody! Anybody..."

But no one answered. Only the blowing breeze filled his ears.

"Help..." Simba choked, the word caught in his throat. He was alone, utterly alone.

Sobbing, Simba padded back to Mufasa and tried burrowing through his thick reddish mane. He crawled up to his father's face, the whiskers brushing against his face. Then he lay beside Mufasa's head and hid his face in his mane, crying softly.

"Simba," a familiar voice sounded from behind them. Through his tears, Simba looked up at his uncle Scar, who was gazing down at him. He had a cold look in his green eyes as he watched the cub mourn for his father. "What have you done?"

"There was a stampede. H-He tried to save me," Simba choked out, the words threatening to lodge in his throat. "It was an accident! I-I didn't mean it to happen!"

"Of course, you didn't," said Scar with sympathy, pulling Simba close to him. It felt like he had sensed the troubles Simba was now going through. "No one ever means for these things to happen. But the king is dead."

Simba felt more tears fall down his cheeks as he leaned against Scar's foreleg. It really was true. Mufasa was really dead. He would never see his father again.

Then what Scar said next chilled his blood: "And if it weren't for you, he would still be alive. Your father had such high hopes for you, gave you so many chances. And this is how you repay him. How could you even think of doing such a dreadful thing?"

Simba pulled away from his uncle, his heart threatening to

shut down. He didn't want to believe it, but he felt that Scar was right. The stampede and Mufasa's death were his faults after all. He couldn't help but cry again.

"What will your mother think?" Scar rasped, stepping away from Simba as if he was a parasite. "She will be so disappointed, to learn that her son caused his father's death, a boy who had killed his king. What if she decided to hate you for what you have done?"

Again, Scar's words frightened and saddened Simba. His mother could indeed hate him for what he had done, wanting nothing more to do with him. "What am I going to do?" he whimpered.

"Run, Simba," Scar replied, staring him down. "Run away, and never return!"

Simba was shocked at his uncle's suggestion. But after looking at his father's lifeless body, he knew that once again, Scar was right. The lionesses would be angry with him for killing their king. He had to leave the Pride Lands, now and forevermore, especially when he was responsible for Mufasa's death.

I'm sorry, Dad, he thought with a sob before turning away. I'm so very sorry.

And with that, he began to run away.

Not far away, Scar watched the cub leave, a small smile crossing his muzzle. This was far easier than he had thought. When he had first come up with this idea to kill Mufasa, he had hoped for Simba to die as well. After all, both needed to

die to ensure that he was next in line for the throne. But guilt-tripping Simba and sending him into self-exile? That was a plan that went off without a hitch.

But then again, Scar guessed, having Simba alive would lead to complications. He could return one day to take the throne from him, being a secret trump card for those loyal to Mufasa, and he didn't want that. No, there was no need to risk Simba coming back and dethroning him. He needed to be gone. Scar needed to take the throne, to make sure that he would become unchallenged.

Growls behind him signaled the arrival of the hyenas. Shenzi walked up to beside Scar and nodded, pleased that he was keeping his end of the deal. In return, Scar looked to where Simba had fled and ordered two words:

"Kill him."

Simba ran as fast as he could. He couldn't get the image of his father's lifeless and mangled body out of his head. No matter how fast he ran, he could not get rid of images of Mufasa's death, Scar's accusations, and Sarabi's possible heartbreak. At the thought of his mother, he stopped and looked around at the walls surrounding him.

What am I doing? I can't leave yet, he thought. I gotta go back and apologize for what I've done. Maybe Mom will understand. I gotta be there for her.

But as he was turning around, he wished he hadn't. The five hyenas he and Nala met in the elephant graveyard were slowly approaching him. They were blocking his only way out, licking their chops, eyes glowing yellow in the shadow of the

walls.

Simba spun around and started climbing up the mound of rocks, up towards a crack. He felt the hot smelly breath of the hyenas behind him; which hyenas it was, but he didn't care to look back and find out. With a grunt, he squeezed through a crack and made it to the other side, away from the gorge and at the edge of the Pride Lands.

But his triumph was short-lived. At the edge of the Pride Lands, it opened up at a cliff, which was a long fall to the bottom. If that wasn't enough to kill anyone foolish enough to fall, the thorns at the bottom could. Before Simba could find another way around, however, the hyenas were already running toward him. Shenzi was at the lead, her fangs bared and her tongue lolling out.

Throwing all caution to the wind, Simba leaped forward, towards the thorn patches at the bottom of the cliff. He tumbled and bumped against the rock, getting bruises all over his body. Behind him, the hyenas found an easier path, bounding and cackling. Simba eventually fell into the thickets, scratched and bloodied from the thorns around him, but it gave him brief protection as he tried navigating his way through to the other side.

All of a sudden, Banzai yelped "Whoa!" the closer they got to the edge of the thickets. He stopped in time, but the extra force of four other hyenas slamming into him sent him sailing into the thorns. Just a few seconds passed, and Banzai shot out of the thicket, yelling as he was prickled by the thorns. While Shenzi and Ed laughed at Banzai, who climbed out all prickly but alive, Kamari walked over to the edge, trying to sniff out Simba. Azizi joined him, nosily siding up beside him

and looking down as well.

"Seriously?" Kamari snapped, irritated at Azizi's nosiness. "Are you for real?"

"Sorry. I'm gonna go right here," muttered Azizi. And he walked to the side, away from Kamari and near Ed.

Kamari nodded. "That's a good distance right there," he growled. "Keep each other company."

"Hey, there he goes! There he goes!" Shenzi suddenly barked. The hyenas looked to where she was glaring. Simba had pulled himself out of the thickets and was making a run for the desert, in the direction of the setting sun.

Banzai was too busy plucking thorns off of his body. "So go get him!"

"There ain't no way I'm goin' in there!" Shenzi scoffed. "What, you want me comin' out lookin' like you, Cactus Butt?"

With a frown, Banzai spat the thorns in his mouth at Ed. It hit Ed on the nose, making him yelp, and he worked on getting those thorns out. "We gotta finish the job," Banzai exclaimed.

"No cub would've survived a fall like that or the thorns. We should tell Scar that we went down there and ate him," Kamari advised.

Azizi licked his chops. "That's good. Because I'm starving."

Kamari turned on him, growling. "We're not gonna eat him! He's already running off!"

"Well, Simba's as good as dead out there anyway," replied Shenzi, staring out to where Simba was leaving. "Like you just said, Kamari, we can just tell Scar that we ate him. That's all he needs to know. And if he comes back, we'll kill him."

No one spoke for a few moments. Finally, Azizi shrugged and said, "Works for me."

"Yeah!" shouted Banzai with a grin. He looked back to where the cub was fleeing. "Hey, you hear that?! If you ever come back, we'll kill ya!"

As Simba ran, he heard the hyena's threats and laughter echo in his ears. He should have been dead from that fall he had taken, from the cliff and into the thorn thickets, bruised and scratched. Yet he was still alive. For some strange kings knew what reason, he was alive. Right now, he wanted to put as much distance between himself and the hyenas as much as possible.

It was foolish to think he could go back. He could never return.

He was exiled from the Pride Lands.

The sun was slowly going down for the day, giving way to the night. The sky had slowly turned from a baby blue to a deep red, the color of spilled blood, and the air was getting slightly cooler. It was a beautiful end to a day that was going to get better...at least for Scar.

A satisfied Scar made his way back to Pride Rock, and he couldn't keep the smile off his face. Shenzi had told him that

they had caught Simba and killed him, eating his corpse before tossing the remains away. This pleased Scar. That loose end with Simba had officially been tied. Now no one would stop him from taking over Pride Rock or finding out about his plan.

So he returned to Pride Rock to break the news to the lionesses and cubs. It was night when he returned when Sarabi had returned from the hunt with her fellow lionesses. Together, they had taken down a young giraffe, a juvenile, and were ready to eat when Scar sauntered up to them.

"Scar?" Sarabi asked warily, looking up from the fresh kill. "What's going on?"

"Is everyone gathered here?" asked Scar. He had put on an air of grief, to prepare to deliver the bad news. "Even the cubs will need to hear this. I have very terrible news for you all. It involves Mufasa and Simba."

At this, Sarabi's amber eyes widened with shock and creeping fear. She left the fresh kill to fetch everyone in the pride, from the oldest lioness to the youngest cub. They gathered at the foot of Pride Rock, where Scar sat down before them on a smaller rock. This was how he wanted to imagine himself on his first night as king: looking down on everyone else.

"It is a terrible day for the Pride Lands," Scar announced. "The migrating wildebeest herd stampeded in the gorge today, with young Simba caught in the middle. Our king Mufasa - noble and wise and beloved as he was - died saving Simba from the stampede. Alas, it was all for nothing. Simba had fallen to the stampede as well, his life cut short."

The effect was immediate. Sarabi seemed to understand what was going on...and then let out a cry of despair and roared to the sky, tears streaming down her face. Most of the other lionesses walked over to give condolences to their queen, some crying with her and others praying. Zazu (who had returned shortly after Scar did) gently rested a wing on Sarabi's paw, showing her his sympathies. Even the cubs realized what was going on, little Nala's eyes full of tears when she heard of the death of her friend.

Oh, I am good, Scar thought with a smirk. It was all too satisfying to witness. Mufasa may have been the stronger out of the siblings, but Scar definitely got the acting part down pat.

As it did, Tamino chanted a mourning song, as the lionesses mourned Mufasa. Sarabi was heartbroken, and, unable to bear that her husband and son were no more(well, at least her son was alive- but she wasn't informed so), she fainted into the lionesses' forelegs. Zazu wept profusely. Nala and the other cubs silently, and with much weeping, remembered their friend, who just couldn't wait to be king.

"Mufasa's death is a terrible tragedy," Scar began his eulogy, turning back to the pride. "He was the greatest king that the pride has ever known. To lose a brother is such a deep and personal loss. And to lose Simba..." He allowed himself to trail off as if he was overcome with emotion, gulping as if he was choking back tears. "To lose Simba, who had barely begun to live...a cub whose blood held our future...it's almost too much to endure. I only wish I had gotten to the gorge in time to save them."

He turned his back on the pride so that they didn't see his

smirk. So far, so good, he believed.

Then Scar turned back to the pride, just as the moon was starting to rise. "So it is with a heavy heart that I assume the throne. Mufasa and Simba are gone, which means that I am now your king."

The lionesses murmured among themselves. Only Zira, a younger lioness, watched him with interest. Scar had gotten to know her when she was an outsider, taken in by Ahadi when her mother was killed. During the time she stayed with Ahadi's pride, she had come to know Scar and sympathize with his goals while opposing Ahadi and Mufasa alongside him. At least he could count on her as an ally.

"But I must admit that I cannot bear this burden alone. After all, what is a king without a queen?" Scar pressed on, staring down at Sarabi. He hoped that she would agree right there and then.

To his annoyance, she snarled up at him, her eyes still full of tears. Scar only scoffed at this. She would say yes. One way or another, Scar would not stop until he had what he wanted.

"One more thing I need to address: your new army, which will keep you safe," he went on. He turned to the shadows on his left and called, "Come on out. I hereby invite you all to help yourselves to our bounty."

Sinister cackles echoed from beyond Pride Rock. One by one, Shenzi and her hyenas - a whole army of up to fifty - sauntered towards Scar, slinking past the lionesses. The lionesses were shocked and horrified before they shielded their cubs from the hyenas' view, snarling. What was Scar

doing, inviting them onto their territory for free?

"And so, from the ashes of this tragedy, we shall rise up to greet the dawning of a new era," Scar concluded as the hyenas marched over to stand beside Scar. "An era in which lion, hyena, jackal, marabou, and vulture will live together, where all prejudice is set aside, and where all animals of Pride Rock are equal. Welcome, my pride, to a great and glorious future!"

In the meantime, Sarabi watched the hyenas arrive at Pride Rock as if they owned the place, invading them. Their brown fur was dull and matted, they bared sharp drooling fangs, and their eyes were alive and full of malice. It was all so wrong.

The worst part of it, however, was that her mate and son were dead. Her heart ached at the very thought until it nearly broke. Never again would she feel warm and secure against Mufasa's mane, nor gently groom Simba while he pretended to be king. She looked to the place where she and Mufasa slept with Simba, as a family, and wanted to feel like this was all a horrible nightmare. But it was too real. On one terrible day, they were taken from her forever. Scar was right about Simba being dead much before his prime; he would have been a good king.

Speaking of Scar, as she headed to the cave to grieve, she lifted her gaze to see the new king talking with Shenzi, the leader of the hyenas. He had acted as though he was upset that Mufasa and Simba were dead, but she doubted that he actually missed them. There was no love lost between the brothers. She had known Scar ever since they were younger, and she wished that she could ask him or Mufasa what had happened. But when she did, Scar would scoff, and Mufasa

would look uncomfortable before changing the subject.

As for the lionesses, they followed her with fear and sadness in their eyes. Their cubs looked scared beyond belief at the thought of the hyenas approaching them. Sarabi wanted to run over to them, to comfort them and help them escape this nightmare. What will we do? she asked them silently. We can't let the hyenas take over. They'll destroy everything...and everyone.

Then she saw something that infuriated her, and made her fur itch with anger. Zira, the arrogant young lioness, was sidling up to Scar, actually giggling when he talked with her. As soon as Scar walked off, Sarabi approached Zira, fixing her with a stern glare.

"How can this be a good time to smile and laugh?" she demanded. "This is a day of mourning, not flirting and giggling. Two lives were lost today!"

Zira snorted. "My, my, Sarabi. That temper will get you nowhere," she responded with a simpering tone, a tone that almost made Sarabi want to smack her. "Come on, Sarabi, just admit it. Mufasa's reign was pretty weak, and Scar had the right idea to invite the hyenas into the Pride Lands; he can unite lions and hyenas together. As for Simba, he would've been a pathetic king indeed. With Scar, there will be much more order and progress."

Sarabi knew that Zira didn't particularly get along with Mufasa or Simba, but hearing her slander her late king and son was too much. "You don't know that," she snapped. "Even if you didn't agree with Mufasa, he did his best to uphold this land's traditions. And Simba would have done the

same."

"Quit living in the past already, Sarabi, and get your head out of the clouds," growled Zira. "Scar will be the better king for us, just you wait. Now if you'll excuse me, I must find Scar." Then she paused and snorted, "And as if you would make a good queen for Scar. You're nothing but an old has-been. What good would someone like you do for the pride?"

Whipping her tail at Sarabi's face as she spun around, Zira trotted off. Sarabi fumed, wanting to tell Zira off more, but she decided to leave the selfish lioness to her fantasies.

"Sarabi?" a small voice piped up behind her. The queen turned around and saw Nala crouched before her, eyes full of tears and fright; behind her, the younger cubs began wrestling with each other. "What did Scar mean by a 'new era'? Are we letting the hyenas stay here?"

Now Sarabi realized that she wasn't the only one who lost something today. Nala had lost her best friend; she would never get to play with him again. Sarabi bent down to touch the cub's forehead with her nose, as she had done with Simba many times before.

"I don't know," she admitted, watching as the other lionesses and cubs surrounded her. "I just don't know."

Yips and snarls made the lionesses look around. The hyenas were helping themselves to the lionesses' last kill, chewing and smacking their lips. As they ate, they bit at the younger hyenas, forcing them to stay back. Hyenas were too different from the Pride Lands' lions. Lions in the Pride Lands never hogged a fresh kill, neither bitten nor scratched over a meal.

What was worse was Scar and Zira standing back and grinning, encouraging this behavior.

"Scar thinks we have to live together with the hyenas," Sarabi began slowly. "But I don't think it'll last. Lions and hyenas have always been enemies, even outside the Pride Lands."

"The nerve of that foolish girl," Sarafina added in a disappointed tone; Sarabi could tell that she was talking about Zira. "I know what Scar has become, and I don't know what she sees in him now. With Mufasa and Simba dead, I can only see dark days ahead."

It was true. Zira was not to be trusted anymore, but Scar was the one that Sarabi did not trust at all. He seemed too eager to share the news of Mufasa and Simba's deaths, and the way he asked her to be his queen made her pelt prickle. She would never be his queen. Mufasa would always be in her heart, and she would never accept another mate ever again.

As for Scar's promise that the lion and hyena would live together, Sarabi knew that it was something big. It was also going to be something bad.

Finally, she found the courage to speak. "I don't know exactly what will happen," she told the lionesses and their cubs. "But I know that we will not give up; we just need to let them think that they've won. Scar may think that we will immediately adapt to his 'future', but we'll show him that our spirits cannot be broken." She turned her gaze to the other lionesses, spinning until she could see them all. "Don't always succeed in hunts, and if you do, catch prey as big as a hare; better we do not catch much of anything than give up our meals to the hyenas. Never go anywhere alone. We must

stand united as a pride; we need each other more than ever. So are you with me, lions?"

There was no doubt that they still followed their queen. They dipped their heads to her, and she to them. Pride Rock would always be their home, Sarabi thought as she looked up to the midnight sky. She had lost her mate and son in one day; she could not afford to lose her home too.

Sarabi and Nala stood in Tamino's tree. As it did, Tamino groaned with sadness and tears came out from her eyes causing her to weep loudly. It had been a horrible day, which would only lead to a lot more horrible days. Mufasa and Simba were gone, and Scar had allowed the hyenas to invade their home, flouting the ancient law and tradition of borders. Even Tamino knew that inviting a lot of hyenas to the Pride Lands was just asking for trouble.

"Mi-Leh-Leh, Mbyani Mpoka." she began her lamentation, the prayer that was used when a member of the Pride Lands was needlessly killed. She bowed her head and murmured, eyes focused on her hands as she clenched one into a fist. "Kumuyini. Kembe Ntsembele, Mbiyani Mpoka. Lundila. Mwana Hosanna."

Then she turned her attention to the painting of Simba she had made months ago. Sadness overtook her as she rested her hand on the painting before wiping across it. It was a sign that a royal member of the family - a cub at that - was gone, dead at the prime of his life.

Tamino looked to the sky, at the twinkling stars and the shining moon. "You have left us too soon, my king and prince!" she said with loud weeping. "The pride and your

subjects need your guidance!"

All that answered her was a slight breeze.

They thought that all hope was lost.

Chapter 7

Simba had no idea how long he walked after that, but he was very tired by the time he was out of the Pride Lands. The sun had come and gone several times, but he didn't stop even when he reached the borders. He had only two goals in mind: get away from the Pride Lands, and lose the hyenas.

He limped on until he reached the desert, an area he had never been to before. This was nothing like the Pride Lands, which were lush and green during the wet season; instead, it was a dry and desolate land, with never-ending sand and sweeping dunes in sight. He limped on through the desert, feeling more tired and pained the more he trudged on. At last, Simba could take it no more, and he collapsed. He wasn't sure how far he had walked, but he was sure that he had limped a pretty good distance.

While he lay there, he began thinking. His stomach was empty, yet his mind was full, making it hard to rest. Images flashed through his mind: his father falling into the stampede, and his uncle condemning his actions in starting said stampede. Then another image flashed, one that made his already dry eyes burn with tears: his mother's reaction to Mufasa's death. He could also see her sadness turn to anger toward him once she figured out that he was the one who did it. His ears echoed with what Sarabi would roar at him: that she hated him, wanted to never see him again, and wished

that Simba had died instead.

He definitely could never go back. But there would be no returning anyway, even if he wanted to. Wanting to or not, he was going to die in the desert.

Suddenly, the sounds of vultures screeching reached his ears. Indeed, vultures were circling above him, waiting for the perfect moment to swoop down. Simba wanted desperately to make a run for it, but he couldn't. He was too tired to limp on, too hungry and thirsty to move.

Maybe I should rest, he thought, tucking his legs in. Just for a little bit. And then...I don't know what to do anymore...

While he closed his eyes, he could hear the vultures coming closer and closer, wings flapping and beaks squawking. This time, he did not fight back as he blacked out.

When the lion cub collapsed, the vultures knew that they were getting free meat. It was all alone in the desert, lost and hungry and thirsty. He was so thin that one could see the ribs poking out of his now-dull golden fur. The vultures landed beside the unconscious lion cub, ready to settle down with a meal.

Suddenly, a yell and a brown blur caused one of the vultures to look closer at the blur. A grayish-brown warthog came shouting and charging at them, headbutting any birds unlucky enough to still stay on the ground. Besides the warthog, a meerkat jumped down from the warthog's back, yelling at the vultures and trying to smack them with his paw. Then, a brown girl with purple hair came from Unova (in Asia where she tamed tigers and peacocks). Her name is Iris.

The vultures got the message. They lifted off from their soon-to-be meal and flew away, leaving behind nothing but dust and feathers.

"I love this game!" Iris cheered once all of the vultures were gone. "Catching the Vultures! I told you our first round wouldn't hurt, Timon!"

"Yeah, you told me. Gets 'em every time!" the meerkat named Timon chuckled, dusting off his paws. "Any eggs there? I'm telling ya, Pumbaa, they're best when the vultures pop 'em out!"

The warthog named Pumbaa put his nose to the ground, sniffing and snorting. "No, I don't see or smell any eggs. But I'm gonna get one of those vultures again one day. You'll see! I'm gonna get one!"

Timon snorted. "Yeah, sure, when you fly. When did you get the habit of chasing them anyway?"

"It makes me feel better," replied Pumbaa.

This meerkat and warthog duo, whose names were Timon and Pumbaa, had quite a history together. They had met only a few months ago, yet they were inseparable. One wouldn't usually see one without the other, whether they ate their favorite meal or relaxed the day away. Most of all, they liked having fun, every day being one long party for them.

"Uh-oh." Iris said watching the horror and tragedy. She had found a small golden mound of fur where the vultures had gathered. "Hey, Timon, you better come look. I think it's still

alive."

"Alive?" Timon piped up, looking curious. "Looks like a fur coat to me. And it looks like it's just my size!"

Pumbaa tilted his head to the side. "But what if it's someone else's fur coat?"

"Forget them. What about me?" Timon scoffed, walking up to the fur coat. "I'm a naked meerkat! I'm gonna need it for those chilly nights. And I'm pretty sure that this fuzzy coat is just the thing we need. So okay, what do we have here?"

The meerkat sniffed the body, his front paws feeling around for a heartbeat. He bent down and lifted up the creature's heavy front paw, and he yelped when he saw its face.

"JEEZ, IT'S A LION!" Timon suddenly shrieked, running for a rock. "Run, Pumbaa, run! It's a lion!"

Pumbaa took a closer look at the cub, his eyes full of sympathy. "Come on, Timon, it's just a little lion!"

"It gets bigger!" Timon called back.

"But look at him," Pumbaa protested, turning back to see the lion cub. The cub looked frail and thin as if he had lived his entire life in the desert. "He's so cute and all alone!"

"Oh yeah, he's cute," Timon snapped, his voice full of sarcasm. "Nothing says cute like a five-hundred-pound monster that can suck my blood out!"

"No! I think lions are found in the zoos of America." said Iris

looking at Timon and Pumbaa.

Pumbaa looked around, looking for the cub's parents. Once he saw that no one was coming for him, he turned back to Timon, a pleading look on his warty face. "Can we keep him?"

At this, Iris began yelling like a peacock, "Pumbaa, ARE YA NUTS?! You're talking about a lion! Lions eat guys like us!"

"Come on, I promise I'll take care of him!" Pumbaa pleaded. "I can take him out for walks, I can clean up his messes - "

"One of his messes being you once he eats you!" Timon retorted. "And then he'd use my body as a toothpick! Plus, you can't have a pet! Remember that beetle you brought back home?"

They could both remember that. One time, Pumbaa had wanted a pet to bring home, so he ended up "adopting" a beetle. It didn't last long, however, as it had accidentally ended up being in his dinner.

"That was an accident. And some of my friends are carnivores, you know. Not all carnivores are bad," Pumbaa said. Ignoring Timon saying that at least those carnivores didn't hunt them, the warthog continued, "Hey, once he gets bigger, what if he's on our side?"

This only made Timon laugh. "Hahaha! That is the stupidest thing I've ever - hey. Wait a minute." His eyes grew bright, and a smile started to come to his face. "Once he gets bigger, what if he's on our side?" he asked, taking credit for Pumbaa's idea. "You know - and hear me out, my porcine pal - having a lion around might not be a bad idea after all."

Pumbaa's tail shot up like a flag, and he bent down to gently scoop the cub onto his tusks and snout. "So we're gonna keep him?"

Timon ran over to climb onto Pumbaa's back. "Yes, of course, we're gonna keep him. Who's the brains of this outfit?" Pumbaa tried to think, but Timon already said, "My point exactly. Boy, I'm feeling fried. Let's get outta here and find some shade."

So they went off to the nearest oasis, Pumbaa chanting, "We're gonna name him Fred!"

Iris transformed into a penguin using her animal transformation tool.

The first thing Simba felt was something wet splashing on his face. It felt too warm to be actual water. He had also heard voices as he woke up, but these voices were unfamiliar. When he opened his eyes, he took in his surroundings. The desert was behind him, and he was resting in a small oasis, a small clump of tropical trees, and a pool of water.

He also saw that he wasn't alone now. Instead, a meerkat and a warthog were watching him with concern. The warthog was, anyway. The meerkat, in the meantime, looked torn between concern and wanting to flee. He had been the one to splash some water onto his face to wake him up.

The meerkat tilted his head. "You okay, kid?"

"I-I guess so," Simba stammered.

"You nearly died," the warthog said.

"I saved you," bragged the meerkat. The warthog snorted at him, and he retracked, "Well, he helped...a little. So yeah, we're the guys who saved your life. Risked everything too, fighting angry vultures!"

"Hordes of them! Flocks!" the warthog reminded the meerkat. "Anyway, my name's Pumbaa. And this is my best buddy, Timon."

But Timon was already caught up in his story. "Oh yeah, there were a bunch of 'em flocking us. It was horrible. I told Pumbaa 'If we don't make it out, tell Ma and Uncle Max and the folks where I was and that I hoped they weren't disappointed in me'. But we lived to tell the tale and saved you. No need to thank us." When Simba merely stared at him, Timon remarked, "You do know that we saved you, right?"

I wish you hadn't. It would've saved everyone the trouble, Simba thought miserably. But all he could say instead was, "Yeah. Thanks."

He bent down to lap up the water from the oasis. It was too warm and gritty to fully enjoy, but at least it was enough to leave him quenched. All those times he had complained about being at the watering hole flashed across his mind, and he now wished he appreciated the watering hole more. He wished he was back there, playing with Nala and splashing around in the shallow end.

Once he finished drinking, he turned his back on the trio and started walking away, back out into the desert. His paws felt like they were stepping on glass, and his belly growled in

protest about the lack of food.

"Hey, where you going?" Timon called after him.

"Doesn't matter," was all Simba said.

The duo watched him go, sympathy on their faces. When Simba was slightly out of earshot, Pumbaa murmured, aghast, "'Doesn't matter'? How bleak is that?"

"Like we don't have enough problems on our plate," Timon muttered. "Gee, he sure looks blue."

"I'd say he looks more brownish-gold," said Pumbaa.

"No, I mean he's depressed," Timon responded. Sometimes, even though they were best friends, Pumbaa was a little too literal-minded and naïve about lots of things.

"Oh...then we should help him!" Pumbaa left the shade, followed by Timon, until he caught up with Simba. When they sat down, Pumbaa asked Simba, "Hey kid, what's eating you?"

"Nothing, he's at the top of the food chain!" Timon chortled. He started laughing out loud, nudging Simba to get him to laugh. "Get it? The food chain!"

But Simba didn't laugh or even smile. Even Pumbaa, who was easily amused by jokes, gave Timon a look. This made Timon realize that the joke didn't land well, so he stopped laughing.

"So..." Timon cleared his throat. "Where ya from?"

"Who cares?" Simba grumbled. "I can't go back."

"If you can't go back, little lion," Pumbaa asked, "then is there someone who can take you home?"

"And by someone," Timon added, "he means a large hairy beast? A large hairy beast with a mane and razor-sharp claws and teeth?"

Simba didn't even shrug. "No. No one will ever find me."

Iris replied, "Scar, Schmar. That's the one."

"Oh, you're an outcast? That's great; so are we!" Timon leaned back against a rock, saying, "Spill the beans, kid. We love us a good fellow outcast story."

"I really love 'em," Pumbaa added, starting to tear up. "They make me cry. I love the ones where an animal falls in a pit and has to eat his own foot."

Simba was confused by Timon and Pumbaa. These two seemed very silly to be around, yet they didn't seem to mean any harm. But there was still going to be no way that he would tell them what happened.

"So what happened to make you an outcast?" Timon asked. "Were you too small?"

Simba shook his head.

"Too slow?" Timon guessed again. "Anxious? Aggressive? Envious? Gassy?"

"Well, Pumbaa is gassy and I am not! I am Iris with a lovely floral scent." said Iris combing her hair.

This almost made Simba smile some more, and he almost laughed at the last part. Timon being determined to guess the answer was a little entertaining. He even started feeling a little better.

At least, until Pumbaa sobbed, "I love the stories where the outcast accidentally eats a relative. Well...okay, they weren't really related, the uncle being a beetle and the nephew being a warthog, but...it's so sad!"

Any good feeling Simba had vanished with that statement. Did they know that he had killed his father? They could realize that he was Mufasa's murderer and send him back to Pride Rock, to face the anger of pride.

But then he realized that he was being paranoid. Timon and Pumbaa were just being silly and guessing; they probably didn't even know about what happened at the Pride Lands. Still, their banter had reminded him of what he had lost, and he didn't want to stick around anymore. So he spun around and began to walk away again.

At last, Pumbaa cleared the tears from his eyes, looking almost his perky self again. The two caught up with him again, and Pumbaa asked with concern, "So what'd you do, kid?"

"I did something terrible," Simba answered. "I don't wanna talk about it."

"There's gotta be something we can do," Pumbaa pressed on.

The old Simba would have smiled, thanked them, and told them about the adventures so far. But now, all he wanted was to be away from everyone else. He was a murderer, and he knew that a murderer should not be near anyone.

"No," Simba snapped, now feeling irritated. "Not unless you can change the past. Now leave me alone."

He started walking away again, but he didn't get far at all. The combination of hunger and thirst made him feel dizzy on his paws. Simba collapsed on one side, and Timon and Pumbaa ran over to help him get back up. Pumbaa gently nudged him to his paws with his snout, and Timon got under Simba and pushed upward.

Once Simba was recovering, Timon slipped out and stood in front of him. "Listen, uh...what's your name, kid? I can't keep calling you 'kid' all the time."

While Simba didn't want to tell the meerkat his name, he was getting tired of arguing. "Simba," he said.

"Right. Simba," Timon repeated, and he rolled the name on his tongue for a bit. "Simba, Simba, Simba...cool name. Anyway, Simba, you were right earlier. No one can change the past. That's a pretty tall order, if I'm being honest."

"That there's a biggie," Pumbaa agreed.

Timon nodded and got his attention back on Simba. "But we can change the future," he pressed on. "That's our specialty."

In spite of himself, this left Simba interested. "You can

change the future?"

Pumbaa nodded his big head. "We sure can! We can change your future too. It's easy! It's like what my buddy Timon always says: you gotta put your behind in your past!" Then he looked confused as he looked around the desert. "Or behind one of the rocks out here."

"No, no, no!" Timon scolded Pumbaa, who looked embarrassed.
"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Hold on a second!" said Iris.
Timon said to Pumbaa, "Amateur. Lie down before you hurt yourself." To Simba, he said, "It's... You have to put your past behind you."

"Way behind." said Iris.

"Look." Timon said trying to chase a grasshopper. "Bad things happen, and there's nothing you can do about it, right?"

"Right." said Simba.

"No! WRONG! When the world turns its back on you, you turn your back on the world!"

"And only embrace what's next!" Pumbaa added helpfully.

Timon nodded. "Exactly. And turn the what into so what?'"

Simba narrowed his eyes. He recalled Mufasa telling him about the Circle of Life, how everything was connected, nothing was forgotten, and everyone was important. What Timon and Pumbaa were suggesting, however, sounded like the complete opposite. "That's not what I was taught," he

remarked.

"Then maybe you need a new lesson," replied Timon, and he cleared his throat. "Repeat after me: Hakuna Matata."

"What?" Simba asked. The new words confused him and made his tongue feel tied.

"Hakuna Matata." Iris repeated. "It means no worries."

"Most people get a bigger reaction when we mention the first place." said Pumbaa.

Timon nodded in agreement. "Yeah, I thought everyone knew about it! It's a wonderful phrase!"

No worries? Simba thought, baffled. How could anyone live without any worries in their life? Everyone has to have some worries, he believed.

"Come on. Let's get to some shade," said Timon. "I'm boiling out here. Come with us, and we'll tell you more about Hakuna Matata."

They started heading back to the oasis, and Simba pondered over what it really meant to have no worries. That sounded a lot better than constantly worrying as he had for the past few days. Maybe he could give it a try.

Chapter 8

Once they got back to the shade, Timon, Iris, and Pumbaa had Simba settled down in a bush. It felt a lot more

comfortable than the sand, that was for sure. Pumbaa was holding a branch with his tusks and snout and fanning Simba with it, while Timon helped trim his claws. His claws had ached from not being sharpened in a long time.

Simba still felt hungry, but at least he had had some water and a decent grooming. Finding food wouldn't probably be that hard now that he was feeling refreshed and quenched.

"What's that you said earlier?" Simba asked, leaning forward. "Hakuna Matata?"

"Yeah," said Pumbaa. "It's our motto!"

"What's a motto?" Simba pressed on.

"Nothing? What's a motto with you?" Timon joked and laughed. "Boom!"

"Nice!" Pumbaa cheered, laughing before turning back to Simba. "You know, kid, these two words will solve all your problems."

Timon nodded. "That's right. Take Pumbaa here. Why..." He ran over and climbed up to sit atop Pumbaa's head. "When he was a young warthog..."

"When I was a young wart...HOOOOOOOOG!" Pumbaa sang loudly. He sang so loud that the oasis seemed to rumble, and Simba felt his ears ache.

At this, Timon reached down and patted his forehead. "How do you feel?"

"It's an emotional story," replied Pumbaa with a sheepish grin.

"I know. Very nice vocal chords, though."

"Thanks."

Simba pulled himself out of the bushes, interested. Pumbaa seemed like a sensitive soul, even though he looked thick-skinned.

"Well, for starters..." Pumbaa backed away from them, looking behind them as he wriggled his rear. "...let's say that I give other animals a wide berth. It hurt when my friends never stood downwind."

"Oh come on, I resent that," Timon scoffed. "I was always there for you! Layman's terms are," he added with a smirk to Simba, "his aroma can clear the savannah after every meal. In other more gross words, he can stink really badly. His farts are bad enough to knock a crocodile out cold."

"I don't know about that, Timon," said Pumbaa, a grin on his snout. "I think the scent's good once someone gets used to it. It announces my presence."

"And boy does it!" Timon replied, fanning the air with a paw, and the two laughed.

Simba wasn't sure whether to laugh or not. These two were friendly, yet they were really weird. "What about you?" he asked Timon.

"Me? I didn't fit in with the meerkat colony I was born into,"

Timon said, having the air of a soldier that had traveled and fought for a long time. "I was always collapsing tunnels and goofing off on sentry duty. Almost everyone got mad at me, especially my Uncle Max, who trusted me with it one day when it was on my day to be on sentry duty. And to be honest, all we did was dig so we could hide, and hide so we could dig. But ever since I left the colony, I've had no worries because I could finally look beyond what I can see."

"Now, let’s take Iris here. Why..." He ran over and climbed up to sit atop Iris's head. "When she was a young penguin..."

"When I was a young PENGUIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIN!!!!" Iris sang loudly. She sang so loud like a soprano that the oasis seemed to rumble again, and Timon felt his ears ache like Simba.

Iris said to Simba, Timon, and Pumbaa. "I have the loveliest floral scent on my hair. Many penguins love me. I met Ash. And then, I flew underwater. I caught a fish and made the fish cooked."

Pumbaa perked his head. "Isn't that what the red-crowned peacock told you to do? You told me about the peacock."

Timon scoffed. "Oh yeah, sure. Just do what the red-crowned peacock tells you, and things will be just gravy!"

"What peacock?" Simba asked, curious. He remembered something about a certain red-crowned crane.

"That's Tamino. The red-crowned crane. She got a peacock's tail." said Iris.

"Never mind that," said Timon. "Anyway, we'll show you

where we live. Follow us."

So Timon and Pumbaa led the way through the undergrowth of the oasis. The desert behind them was fading away until it disappeared behind the shadows of the oasis's trees. Due to starving, however, he started lagging behind. Pumbaa noticed this, so he and Timon went back to help encourage him to keep moving.

While they walked, Timon, Iris, and Pumbaa started singing. It was about their Hakuna Matata lifestyle, and it was called - of course - "Hakuna Matata". It was their problem-free philosophy, as they sang. Simba couldn't help but smile as they sang and danced, and he eventually joined in. His spirits were starting to go back up, and he sang merrily along with Timon and Pumbaa.

After having walked enough, the two friends stopped before a wall of giant leaves. They cleared it away, and Simba now stood in awe, looking out at what was before him. It was a vast jungle, with waterfalls, a few mountains, and obviously lots of trees. Flowers of every color bloomed here and there, from small yellow flowers to giant red ones the size of a rhino. While the Pride Lands was beautiful, it had a more realistic tone to it, turning green during the wet season and brown during the dry season. But this jungle looked like something out of a dream; it was paradise.

"Well, kid," said Timon with a grin, "welcome to our humble home."

"You live here?" Simba asked in amazement.

Timon nodded. "Yep. We live wherever we want here."

"Do as we please," Pumbaa added. "Home is where your rump rests."

"And when we get tired of one spot, we just pick another," Timon put in.

"This waterfall is infested and filled with crocodiles. At midnight, when you go to the river, the crocodiles will come out and will eat you alive!" said Iris.

Simba couldn't stop staring around at the jungle before him. "It's beautiful," he murmured. Perhaps there was something about the Hakuna Matata lifestyle after all.

The friends led Simba on through the jungle, down a path they had taken many times before until they arrived at a clearing. A big tree dominated the back of the clearing, its branches, and leaves providing many shelters. Several animals were grazing or chatting peacefully, some Simba had seen before and other species that were new to him. A galago was clinging to a tree branch, an elephant shrew was sniffing the bark for a treat, and two Guinea fowl perched on a branch opposite the galago, gossiping. Below them, antelopes called duiker grazed, an aardvark sniffed the ground, and a bat-eared fox tried getting a grumpy honey badger to play with her.

Timon and Pumbaa called hello to the animals, and they returned it with a happy greeting (even though the honey badger grumbled it). But when Simba came out from behind them to say hello, they shouted in fear and started to take cover, while only the honey badger remained, growling.

"Hey, don't worry. He's our new friend Simba. He won't hurt a fly," Timon reassured the other animals as they peeked out. "Simba, meet our neighbors. There's Bhati the bat-eared fox, Daabi the aardvark, and - "

"That, my friend, is a lion!" squawked one of the Guinea fowl. "A lion's in the jungle!"

"What about food? Have you thought about feeding that thing?" squeaked the galago, his large eyes bigger than usual from fright.

Pumbaa came to Simba's defense when he saw the cub flinch. "Yeah. We've got an idea."

"He dooks snorda derocious," remarked the aardvark named Daabi. She had a sort of dopey appearance and a slurred vocabulary to boot.

The fox named Bhati poked her head out from the bushes. "I don't know, Daabi," she told the aardvark as she crept out more. "He looks like a cute little guy."

"That lion knows a mental map!" Serena said (returned to the jungle from Kalos) to Valerie (from Laverre City).

"What's a lion doing here anyway?" the honey badger snarled, his voice deep and harsh. His black-and-white fur bristled, and he bared his teeth.

Simba was surprised to see a honey badger in the jungle. He had heard about them being ferocious predators, able to face down anything that came their way. Perhaps a honey badger could even face down a whole wildebeest stampede.

"Come on, back up, Bunga. He's just a cub," Pumbaa argued, gently nudging the badger. "Even you can't argue with that."

"Well, I don't care. I don't give a darn," growled the badger named Bunga, scooting away from Pumbaa. "Lions are nothing but trouble."

Timon tilted his head sideways. "Your species can be dangerous too, Bunga, but you're cool."

Bunga grumbled something, but then he shrugged his broad shoulders. "Eh, I can't argue with that," he said, changing his tune to an arrogant attitude. "We honey badgers are pretty awesome."

All of a sudden, Pumbaa let out an extremely loud burp, the burp echoing in the jungle. "I'm starved!" he declared, and the bat-eared fox named Bhati said, "Oh, come on. we got 10 minutes until we reach the buffet."

"So am I," Bunga said, getting up from his spot. "I'm so hungry, I can eat you two. Let's go eat."

"Me too," said Simba. "I'm so hungry, I can eat a whole zebra."

The other animals gasped when they heard Simba say that. One of the Guinea fowl actually fainted and fell from the branch she roosted on.

Immediately, Timon jumped onto Pumbaa's back while they walked. "Er...oh boy, here we go," he said with a nervous chuckle. "Listen, kid...we're fresh out of zebra."

Simba frowned. His belly was roaring even louder than Mufasa's roar. He didn't care if what he had to eat wasn't his favorite, as long as he finally got to eat.

"Then what about antelope?" Simba asked, and an antelope flinched and gulped.

"Nuh-uh."

"Hippo?"

"Nope," said Timon with another shake of his head. "Simba, there's one little thing we gotta get straight here. If you live with us, then you have to eat like us."

"And more importantly, not eat us!" added the elephant shrew.

Timon looked to the left and held up a paw, signaling for Pumbaa to stop. "Speaking of eating, this looks like a good place to rustle up some grub."

They spun to the left and headed towards a log. It looked like it was rotting for a long time, broken in some places. Simba was confused. How was this a good place for good food? It wasn't big enough to hide a zebra or an antelope, and it definitely would not hide a hippo.

When they got there, Pumbaa started using his tusks to tear apart the log. Simba watched the other animals run past him to help Pumbaa break apart the log, Bhati using her teeth and Bunga and Daabi using their claws. Even the galago joined in, gnawing at the edges with his own front teeth. A

crack crunched from the log, and they were able to get the log open easier now.

As Bunga helped peel open the bark from the log, Simba got to see what was under the bark. What looked like insects were crawling and creeping around. They were of different colors, shapes, and sizes. Some looked fat and juicy-looking, while others looked thin and crunchy. Some had wings and hard shells, and he was sure that a few even had pincers.

"What is it?" Simba asked though he did not really want to know.

"A grub," grumbled Bunga. "A whole nest of 'em. What's it look like?"

Iris noticed the grub. "Eww. Gross!"

"No, it's not 'gross'!" Timon said with a grin. To Simba and Iris's disgust, he pulled a fat one out and slurped it up like it was nothing. "See? It tastes like chicken."

The other animals dived right in for the feast. The elephant shrew got a big juicy grub between his teeth, the galago shoved one grub into his mouth at a time, and Bunga shoveled more into his mouth with a paw. Daabi, Bhati, and the Guinea fowl ate as well, even the plant-eating duiker nabbing a grub or two. As for Timon and Pumbaa, they sat at the center of the "table", eating to their hearts' content.

Simba, however, almost felt like throwing up. Whatever appetite he had was slowly going away. All the times he had been picky about eating impala, and now he found it to be tastier than...this.

Now he wasn't sure if the Hakuna Matata lifestyle was for him after all. He couldn't imagine even eating a grub, let alone living off of them. Timon and Pumbaa were friendly, but the other animals didn't seem to like him due to him being a lion. More than ever, he wished that he was back at home at Pride Rock, playing with Nala and nestling closer to his mother. And most of all, he missed his father and wished with all his heart that he was still alive.

Back at the feast, the animals were talking with each other as they ate. Simba flicked his ears to hear them better.

Timon found one grub and grinned. "Ah, these are rare delicacies," he declared and took a bite from it. "Piquant...with a very pleasant crunch."

"This one's got the nuttiness!" the elephant shrew squeaked.

"These are extra crunchy," mumbled one of the duikers.

"Yeah, I hear they're local," replied Bhati.

"Oh, are they, Bhati?"

"They're from right there."

"Bet I can beat you birds in an eating contest!" Bunga challenged the Guinea fowl.

"You're on, muscles!" squawked one of them.

"Slimy yet satisfying!" declared Pumbaa happily, slurping down a big grub. He ate some more and then turned to

Simba, who recoiled from seeing him eating grubs up close, as he declared, "You'll learn to love 'em!"

Timon wiped his mouth with his paw and smiled up at Simba. "I'm telling ya, kid, this is a great life. We can do anything we want all day long, every single day. There are no rules, no responsibilities, no commitment - "

"Ooh, there's the one with the very pleasant crunch!" the galago cheered as he munched on. "You're right, Timon, these are great!"

"Yeah bight," Daabi replied. "Be cream-billed ones are de dest. Banna try done?"

"Yes, come on!" shouted Serena. "You can do it!" yelled Valerie.

" - and best of all, no worries," Timon continued as if he hadn't been interrupted. He and the other animals with Serena and Valerie stepped aside so that Simba could have a taste. "Well?"

Simba approached the log, picking up a fat grub, and the other animals were watching him with a keen eye. He knew that he wasn't at Pride Rock anymore, Timon, Pumbaa, and the other jungle animals weren't his families and old friends but the jungle animals are Iris's friends after all, and the grub was definitely not a zebra. But a life of no worries, rules, or responsibilities did sound pretty good. This was going to be his life from now on, eating all day and relaxing his life away.

"Oh well," he mumbled, bringing the grub closer. "Hakuna Matata."

So he tried the grub and put it in his mouth. Only...it didn't taste so bad after all. He swallowed, and it actually tasted even better going down.

"Slimy yet satisfying," he declared with a smile.

"That's it!" Timon said with Iris, while the other animals cheered. "Kid, this is the start of a beautiful friendship."

"Yeah! You're gonna love it here and we didn't lie!" added Pumbaa with a big grin.

And with that, everyone continued their feast. This time, though, Simba joined them.

Thus, Simba grew up in the jungle, far away from the Pride Lands. He loved eating as many grubs as he wanted and the Hakuna Matata lifestyle. Timon and Pumbaa helped him learn how to survive, but they made it fun by singing carefree songs and making a game out of it. Simba felt a lot better and eventually got over the death of his father, enjoying life.

Everyday, he would visit the other animals in the jungle, who now greeted him as an old friend. No longer did they hide for cover; in fact, every time Simba visited Bunga, the honey badger would challenge him to wrestle. The other animals admired Simba for his positive attitude and friendly nature, not knowing his grim past. Whenever they wanted to play a game with him or hang out, Simba was there. Whenever they needed a favor, he was ready to do it. Whenever a tiger tried to hunt them, Simba drove that tiger away with a growl.

As Timon said, it was a good life. Simba spent his days

eating, sleeping, playing, and goofing around. There were no rules, no responsibilities, and especially no worries.

Serena and Valerie are Iris's best friends.

Chapter 9

Nala rested her head on her paws, looking around the desolate wasteland with disgust and despair. She had grown up over the years, knowing nothing but hunger and thirst and misery. While she grew up to be a skilled and slender huntress (though at this point, slender was pushing it, since she had become too skinny), her fur coat was dull, and her teal eyes no longer held laughter.

Life at the Pride Lands had become miserable ever since Scar took over as king. Where there was once fresh greenery and plentiful watering holes, there was now dust and bones. Animals, whether predator or prey, had started abandoning this once-fertile land, to move on to better grazing grounds. Those that stayed behind risked being hunted down by the army of hyenas led by Shenzi, and it was usually done without mercy. The fourteen dolphins in their pool are carried by helicopters with zookeepers to the ocean. The penguins and polar bears stayed in their enclosures. One of the penguins (a Magellanic) had waddled to the jungle! The sea lions went into their dolphin pool. The Pride Lands ended up looking even more like the elephant graveyard, a shadow land. Even the animal theme park with the aviary, aquarium, and zoo with worldwide animals were kept by good and smart zookeepers from famine and getting killed by any other carnivore and omnivore including grizzly bears and wolves.

And it was all because of Scar. Nala never realized she could hate anyone in her life, but Scar did certainly that. Scar was a terrible and selfish creature, not caring if the lions in his pride were on the brink of starvation. Things had quickly spiraled downhill once Scar became king. He had torn down everything that Mufasa and kings before him had built up. He even allowed the hyenas to overhunt their prey and sometimes even joined them in their poaching.

If Simba were here, he'd take his place as king and stop Scar, Nala thought, not for the first time ever. Indeed, she wished more than ever that her best friend was by her side again, just as they had always been. She even believed that he was still out there, still alive. Even the other lionesses prayed as well, prayed that the great kings were watching over them, to help them out of this nightmare.

Yet the pride's hope in the great kings started to vanish. Indeed, some lionesses even gave up all belief in the great kings, demanding why they weren't doing anything if they loved their descendants. Nala herself nearly felt it too, only she gave up hope in Simba being alive. Right now, she wanted to go out there and find someone - or at least something - to help the pride, and her wish to stop Scar fueled her dream to do so. But still, life around them got tougher, and even Sarabi gave up trying to inspire hope.

"Nala." Her mother Sarafina was looking at her with concern. She was trying to calm down a squealing cub they were babysitting, a cub that bore almost the same resemblance to Scar except with paler fur. "Come sit in the shade with us. It's too hot to stay out there."

Nala sighed and padded over to join them. The lionesses tried to avoid the heat of the dry season sun, their coats dull and their eyes full of hopelessness.

As they took shelter, the sound of flapping wings made them look up. Zazu came flying down and landed right in front of Sarabi, just as he had done for Mufasa. He had refused to report to Scar and remained loyal to the queen, reporting to Sarabi only. Scar, however, decreed that he was to be sent away during the day and come home only at night.

"Hello, Zazu," Nala greeted the hornbill. "Where've you been?"

"I apologize, Nala. I came as quick as I could," Zazu responded. Then he bowed to Sarabi, who dipped her head in return.

"The morning report, Zazu," Sarabi commanded.

"Yes, Your Majesty," responded Zazu, standing up. "The Pride Lands are in terrible danger. The hyenas are chasing off the last of the herds. Without those, what will you lionesses and your cubs eat?"

"We'll manage, Zazu," Sarabi reassured her late mate's advisor, touched by Zazu's concern for the royal family...or what was left. "Right now, are you all right?"

What he was about to say next was interrupted by a terrible cackle. Scar and his hyenas had returned from their hunt, a dead antelope in the jaws of two hyenas. Their muzzles were completely coated with blood, as if they had tortured the poor antelope before they killed it. When the hyenas spotted

Zazu, their eyes glimmered.

"The bird's back!" Azizi announced.

"Get him!" Kamari shouted.

They darted over to snatch up the hornbill as their snack. Luckily for everyone else, Zazu took to the air, nearly avoiding their snapping teeth.

"Don't come back here until sundown, unless you wanna get eaten!" Kamari shouted up to Zazu as the majordomo took off.

The lionesses glared at the hyenas for this, but they said nothing as Scar sauntered by, green eyes glinting. "Good morning, ladies," he said with a smarmy grin. To his hyenas, he said, "Take the antelope to my den; I'll eat it later. And bring the buffalo to the edge of Pride Rock, for Zira and I."

Ignoring the dull and lifeless eyes of the lionesses on him, he sauntered away. While they were thin and starving, he was more well-fed, even more so than when Mufasa was king. But it came at a cost: Scar had gotten greedy when it came to hunting, taking more prey than he should.

"I can't stand it anymore, Sarabi," Nala murmured once Scar and the hyenas were away, standing on her paws. "We have to do something. We have to fight."

To her utmost shock, Sarabi only shook her head. "No, Nala. Scar is our king."

Nala stepped away from her, aghast at this statement. "But

you're the queen! You're our queen! We should fight back before it's too late."

"While I do not like the idea of Scar being king, we must stay together and protect what's left of this land," Sarabi told Nala, her eyes tired. "The Pride Lands has been our home for generations. We will not abandon it when everyone else needs this land."

"But this isn't the home I remember," responded Nala. She turned her attention back to the desolate land. "This isn't the Pride Lands I used to know."

Sarabi stepped forward and rested her nose on the younger lioness's head. "Don't worry, young one. Our time will come. Just be patient."

Easy for you to say, Nala thought rebelliously. Sarabi was an older and wiser lioness, having all the patience that she herself had not learned. Nala herself wanted to get off of her paws and do something, anything, to save her home.

"Hey you!" Shenzi stalked forward, eyes gleaming as she glared at Sarabi. She was flanked by the other hyenas in her army. "You Sarabi, right? Anyway, Scar's wantin' to talk to you."

Sarabi sighed. "Tell him I'll talk to him later," she said, turning away from the scavengers.

But as soon as she started to walk away, hyenas darted over and blocked her way. "Nah, I think he wants to talk now," growled Shenzi. "And if you're goin' too slow, then you better move faster."

"No, I think you should've said 'You better Mufasa!'" Banzai quiped with a laugh.

"I get it!" Azizi cackled along with Ed, sidling up to Kamari. "It's like 'move faster' only..."

"Yeah, we get it," Kamari grumbled. He shoved Azizi away and snapped, "And what did I say for the hundredth time?"

Sarabi growled, yet she couldn't pounce on them. She hated when they used Mufasa's name like that, as a joke. But all she did was bow her head and nod. There was no point in arguing with the hyenas; Scar always insisted that they were right in everything, and they had to accommodate them or else be accused of prejudice. So much for "all animals are equal", she believed.

"Don't go with them," Nala pleaded.

"I am neither afraid of Scar nor the hyenas," she replied coolly. "I will be back."

Nala watched as the hyenas escorted Sarabi away. Her fur bristled, and her claws threatened to slide out and scrape the rock beneath her paws. She wasn't afraid of Scar or his hyenas, and they certainly did not deserve to be leaders.

Scar had pretty much forced the lionesses and their cubs to spend their time in the open, while he and the hyenas occupied the inside of Pride Rock. But this time, Scar had wanted to eat outside, perhaps - in Sarabi's opinion - to show off how much he could eat.

As Sarabi approached the king as he sat at the edge of Pride Rock, her nose crinkled at the smell of caked blood. His back to her and his head bent, Scar was helping himself to the buffalo that the lionesses killed, munching away. While the other lionesses watched from far away, starving and licking their chops, Scar only kept eating and ignoring their hungry gazes. Shenzi and her hyenas stepped back to let Sarabi walk ahead and have her meeting with the current king.

"I'm here, Scar," Sarabi growled. "What do you want?"

Scar lifted his head from the kill, along with a certain lioness. This made Sarabi want to bare her teeth in anger. It was Zira, having been established as Scar's favorite lioness due to following his every command. She hadn't always been friendly, but for some odd reason, she liked having Scar in charge of the pride and quickly sided with him on every opinion he had. It was small wonder that Scar had chosen her as his mate, though she had produced a sickly son in the process.

"Zira," growled Scar, rising from the carcass. He licked his lips, his muzzle coated in the buffalo's blood. "You may go out and take your pick of anything else that the lionesses caught. Just make sure that weak brat of yours gets something to eat."

"But Nuka is your son, is he not?" Sarabi asked, concerned for her nephew. Zira scoffed, and Sarabi believed that she blamed Nuka himself - a young cub - for being born during a terrible time.

Scar shook his head. "No. Any cub of my blood that is weak will never be mine. There is no chance that he'll be king after

me."

Her brain pounding from memory, Sarabi had remembered hearing something like this before. Scar had said the same thing when Ahadi had apparently told him what he had just told her. But the thing was, as far as she saw and experienced, Ahadi had treated both sons well, only punishing Scar more due to his increasing rebellious behavior.

"That's pretty hypocritical, don't you think?" she pointed out. "You said your father treated you like trash, and yet here you are, treating your own son like trash. How are you not practicing what you've preached?"

Scar started to growl, his lips peeled back to reveal yellow fangs. Zira gave him a lick on the cheek before turning to Sarabi. "You're upsetting your king, Sarabi, and you should be ashamed of yourself," she scolded the older lioness. "Scar is to be respected at all times and never questioned. You need to apologize and learn your place."

Instead of shaming Sarabi, it made the queen even angrier, baring her fangs at Zira. She was getting sick and tired of Zira lording over everyone about how "grand and ambitious" Scar was being, not to mention being neglectful towards Nuka. And how could Zira say that she should be ashamed when she was willingly working with Scar to destroy everything the light touched? But before a fight could break out, Scar stood between them.

"Ladies, ladies...that'll be enough," the king drawled. "Now Zira, go get that cub of yours something to eat. If you still want him alive instead of drowned, then you need to fatten

him up."

Zira nodded. "Of course, my dearest."

And with that, Zira gave Sarabi a hard shove as she passed. You traitor, Sarabi thought angrily before the other lioness vanished.

"As for you, Sarabi, your timing couldn't have been more perfect," simpered Scar. "Do come over. I won't bite. And speaking of bite..." He stepped aside, letting her see the buffalo she and her lionesses had worked to kill, as if taunting her. "Care for a taste? There's plenty to go around."

Sarabi looked around at all the bones littering the surface of Pride Rock, flies buzzing around. The smell was enough to knock out an elephant, if it didn't choke on the flies first. After eating, the lions would usually bury the bones as a sign of respect to the animal that fed them. With Scar, however, he tossed the bones here and there as if expecting someone to come in and clean it up for him.

"You're overhunting, Scar," Sarabi said coolly.

"Overhunting is such a strong word," Scar replied with a smirk. "Let's say that I've simply perfected the kill, with the help of the hyenas."

Before she could stop herself, Sarabi snarled, "Perfected? You're destroying the Pride Lands! You're bringing the Circle of Life to ruin!"

Scar did not grow angry at Sarabi's words. Instead, he laughed. "Don't you see?" he asked between chuckles. "There

is no one who can challenge me. Together, we can finally take whatever we want. And if it means getting rid of the Circle of Life that you worship so much, then so be it."

But Sarabi didn't want to argue with Scar forever. "There's another reason you invited me here, when you just said 'we,'" Sarabi went on. "Let's get it over with."

Scar smiled, though it looked more sinister than happy. "Long ago, Mufasa and I came to propose to you, to be your mate. But you had chosen Mufasa over me."

"Because Mufasa and I loved each other," Sarabi retorted. This wasn't the first time Scar had tried persuading her to be his queen, and her answer was the same. "You even rejected Sarafina because of your attitude."

"But I am king now," Scar went on, overriding Sarabi's words. "I am your king. It's time you stopped being so selfish and started thinking of the future. Our future."

Far from alluring her to him, this further infuriated Sarabi. "You have no room to call anyone selfish here," she snapped, and she didn't bother keeping the disgust out of her tone. "You're the one being selfish. And what about Zira? She's your mate and the mother of your cub."

If Scar looked bothered by Sarabi calling him out, he didn't show it. "The other lionesses look up to you, you know," he wheedled her, putting on a persuasive tone. "As long as you reject me, they will keep defying me. Now as your king, I demand that you must do as I say. Take your place at my side, and we shall feast together!"

Sarabi looked down at the buffalo that Scar and Zira had feasted on. Her stomach roared louder than any lion could at the moment. It was getting harder and harder to say no. The lionesses were on the brink of starvation, and there was no way that Scar would willingly give up some of his food.

Then again, a horrible thought came to her: she could agree to be Scar's queen. If she did, then the lionesses would finally get to eat. Even if it meant that she would have to be Scar's mate, there would be a chance to convince him to turn things around.

But the horrible thought slipped away as soon as it appeared. There was no way she would ever agree to his demand.

"Never, Scar," she snarled. "I will never be your queen!"

Scar rose himself to his paws, looking down at Sarabi. Her response didn't seem to surprise him, but what he said next surprised her. "Then from now on, the hyenas get first rights to a fresh kill. That means that the lionesses and cubs will eat last."

Sarabi's fur along her spine bristled. "You're not seriously choosing them above your pride? They're behaving like revolting scavengers."

"Here at Pride Rock, all animals are equal...but some animals are more equal than others. I will not tolerate others calling my army 'revolting scavengers'. There is no room in the pride for such bigotry," Scar chided her, a cold smirk on his muzzle. "Now wait for your turn to eat. And be warned, my dear Sarabi: they don't leave much behind."

He stepped aside, and the buffalo he promised her went to Shenzi's army instead. At his command, the hyenas rushed forward and pounced on the carcass, chewing and cackling. Scar dismissed Sarabi, and she went on her way, shame and horror making her paws feel heavy.

What have I done?

The zookeeper was humming to the next enclosure, wolves. The zookeeper gave the wolves, Mufasa's flesh. The wolves did not like Mufasa so the zookeeper went into the next enclosure being eagles with Andean and California condors.

Nala waited as every lioness in Pride Rock slept. In the shadows of the cave, Sarafina was still huddled with young Nuka, who looked more comfortable with her than with his own parents. Though their ribs showed through their tawny coats, they looked relaxed in sleep. Even so, Nala felt her eyes well up with tears. Even her and Simba's friends - the cubs they had grown up with - had been divided: her female friends (Kula and Tama) had been drafted into Scar's hunters, while the males (Chumvi, Ni, Malka, and Tojo) were driven out of the pride once they became adults, something that lions from other parts of Africa usually did.

Day by day, the lionesses suffered. Scar had followed through on his promise to feed the hyenas first, leaving the lionesses and cubs to get the leftovers. Whatever scraps were found were given to the cubs first. Of course, Scar not being the head of the Lion Guard anymore didn't help matters either.

He had learned a trick to use the Roar of the Elders at dark clouds to make rain from them, so had he still had the Roar, he would have summoned some long-lasting rain to help heal the land. Alas, he couldn't, and even if he could, he wouldn't.

So that night, Nala decided to leave Pride Rock to find help. On this night Sarabi was awake, her eyes clouded with pain, as she observed how much damage Scar and the hyenas had done. There were no noises that night in the Pride Lands. No night bird noises, no crickets chirping, not even an elephant rumbling but the terrible baying sound of wild dogs and the screeching of vultures. In fact, there wasn't much life left in the Pride Lands. The only animals living there were the lions, hyenas, Zazu, and a few other brave souls that dared make a home here.

Nala walked up to stand beside Sarabi, who looked around at her. "Are you sure there is no convincing you to stay, Nala?" she whispered to the younger lioness.

With a nod, Nala responded, "I have to find help for us, Sarabi. There's no use in waiting anymore."

The older lioness nodded. "I know you do," she murmured. "I just wish for you to be careful."

"And tell my mom not to worry," Nala whispered. "I'll be fine. And I'll be back with help soon, I promise."

Sarabi leaned forward and pressed her nose against Nala's forehead one more time. And this time, she was praying. Nala closed her eyes and prayed with her. She prayed to the great kings to give her strength, to help her find anyone to help the pride save their home.

"Take this prayer with you," Sarabi declared, pulling away from Nala. "And good luck. May the kings of the past watch over you and guide you. And where the journey may lead you, always remember your pride."

Nala nodded and pressed her muzzle against Sarabi's shoulder, while Sarabi headed back into the cave.

There was one major problem as she went out, however: Scar and his hyenas patrolled Pride Rock every night. Back when Mufasa was alive and the king, no one needed to be monitored. They were free lions, relaxed by day and night on good days. But now that Scar was king, hyenas constantly roamed Pride Rock, searching for troublemakers or traitors to Scar. This had caused the lionesses to huddle out of the earshot of Scar and his army as they whispered their opinions of him. And on this night, Scar and a couple of hyenas were making their rounds at the bottom of the great mass of rock.

Nala crouched in a clump of dead bushes, praying that he wouldn't catch her scent. Hyenas had pretty good senses of smell, about as strong as a rhino's sense of smell. She pressed herself into the dirt, hoping to get some of it on her skin so that her scent would be covered. She was just

finishing up when Scar and his hyenas came strolling by, their smell foul with the stench of rotting meat.

Suddenly, Scar stopped right in front of the bush. His green eyes narrowed, and he sniffed once or twice. A sinister snarl form on his muzzle, and his hyenas lined up alongside him, yipping and cackling. He growled at them, and the hyenas chittered back, before they drew nearer to her hiding place. Nala prepared for them all to pounce, to find her and attack her.

But before Scar could get closer, Zazu suddenly flew down in front of him. The hornbill must have seen Nala trying to sneak away, for he was now holding out his wings as if protecting her from Scar's view. "Lovely night, Sire!" he said with a weak chuckle. "What a marvelous night for taking a walk and all that."

Scar rolled his green eyes. "What do you want, Zazu? I need to finish monitoring Pride Rock and everyone who lives here. Make it quick."

While Nala slunk quietly past them, Zazu began telling them stories about his cousin mistaking himself for a woodpecker. Scar and the hyenas began getting bored, at least until Zazu started singing. He at first sung about troubles, only for Scar to tell him to "sing something with a little bounce in it". So Zazu, with a smirk, sung a few song that Scar did not like, songs that some were called "It's A Small World" and "Let It Go". When Scar objected (while roaring "NO! Anything but that!"), Zazu then started singing about a bunch of coconuts

all standing in a row. Scar seemed to enjoy it, humming to the tune, and the hyenas added some humming and whistling as well.

"Big ones, small ones, some about as big as your head," Zazu finished singing, exhausted. "I never had to do that for Mufasa."

But Scar heard him, his face contorting to rage. "WHAT?!" he roared, making Zazu jump up with fright. "What did you say? Don't you dare lie to me!" he snarled as Zazu tried covering what he said. "I told you and everyone else never to mention that name in my presence! I AM THE KING!"

"You never said anything of the sort!" Zazu bit back, losing patience. "You just made that rule up on the spot. Are you that upset over Mufasa's name?"

Behind Scar, some of the hyenas started laughing and mentioning Mufasa's name over and over. Scar's dark fur was bristling until suddenly, he whirled around and smacked those hyenas across the face. The hyenas whimpered and stumbled back, promising never to say Mufasa's name ever again.

"That's it!" Scar snarled, getting into Zazu's face. "I hereby banish you from Pride Rock for life! If I see you around again, I'll eat you myself!"

He swiped his claws at Zazu, who quickly flew away from the flailing claws and up to the night sky. Zazu definitely did not want to be caught by those claws again, not like what happened years ago. Nala watched as the hornbill flew over her, heading for where Tamino's baobab tree was. She hadn't meant to get Zazu into trouble with Scar, but she was still thankful for his help.

"And as for you," Scar snarled, turning his attention to the hyenas, "not a giggle out of your mouths. I will not stand and be mocked with my back turned. Do you understand?!"

The hyenas nodded, and Scar stormed off ahead. As the hyenas followed, Banzai muttered, "Sheesh, Mufasa wasn't whiny compared to him."

"What did you say?!" snapped Scar, turning for the third time.

"I said Muf - " But a nudge to the ribs from Shenzi made Banzai sidetrack. "Er, I said...que pasa?"

Scar didn't look like he believed his soldiers, but he didn't seem bothered to argue. "Good. Now I need my sleep," he muttered. "Keep up the patrol until sunrise."

The hyenas nodded and slunk away from their employer, one by one. Before following Shenzi down Pride Rock, Banzai turned to Scar and said, "But, uh...we're hungry."

"GO!" Scar roared, causing the hyenas to yelp and run. The dark lion gave their retreating forms a disgusted glare before making his way back to where the king usually slept.

Once sure that Scar and the hyenas were gone, Nala slipped out from under the bush and began making a run for it. Then she looked up to the stars in the sky, hoping that the great kings were running with her that night. One more look at Pride Rock, which was appearing smaller the more she ran, and she headed for the Pride Lands border.

She walked across the broken ground of her once green and flourishing home with a heavy heart. The other lionesses of the pride decided that she should be the one to leave to find help since she was the youngest and most vibrant of them. Also, Nala was almost eager to leave because of the advances that Scar had made to her. Still, where would she find someone to help her pride through this difficult period when even the hyenas were having a tough time of it?

Just as Nala was thinking this, she passed Tamino's Baobab tree and she heard a voice calling her name from above her.

"Who's there?" She called, looking all around her.

"It is I!" called Tamino back to her, as she swung down to meet her. "Tamino. Where are you going?"

"To go find someone to help the pride. This drought has got to stop and since Scar’s not doing anything about it, I’m going to find anyone who will."

"Do you know where you're going?" Asked the red-crowned crane.

"I haven't a clue. I just know I have to go far from here to a land that isn't affected by this drought."

"I will be right back." Tamino then went back up in her tree and came back to Nala with three different gourds each with different colors of paint in them. Nala looked at her strangely as she started chanting. She then explained what the different colors were for as she put each of them on Nala’s forehead.

“Green for growth in oneself and health for your journey; red for courage and strength to fight off any enemies that might come your way; and orange for responsibility.” As Tamino put the orange on Nala’s head, she thought of Simba and how she had put that very same color on his head when he was just a newborn cub. She then knew who it was that Nala had to find, even if she didn’t know herself for Tamino knew that Simba was alive and that knowledge was finally going to come into play.

“I will tell you where you must go. There is a jungle where I found the berries to make the red coloring and there you might find someone who will help you. If you run straight that way you will find it.” Said Tamino pointing diagonally to the right. “But be aware there are many dangers out there and it is a long journey.”

“Thank you, Tamino.” said Nala.

“You’re welcome and please be careful!” yelled Tamino.

“I will.” And with that Nala ran off toward the direction that Tamino had shown her, in hope that she would find this jungle and someone that would help her restore her homeland back to the way it was before.

I will be back, my pride, with all the help I will need, she promised as she ran off into the night. I will return!

Chapter 10

Back in the Hakuna Matata jungle, Simba grew up happy and carefree, loving his new life. Every day was one long party, and life got no better than this. His days were spent playing and eating and hanging out with his jungle friends. And his nights were spent talking with his friends and sleeping. Hakuna Matata seemed to have that effect on the jungle; he was sure even frogs couldn't go without croaking "Hakuna Matata!"

Simba had also grown in size, resembling his father more than anything. He had inherited his father's reddish mane, though it had become less refined and more scruffy. Years of running, climbing, and pouncing had given him the exercise he needed. As for what to eat, he did eat grubs like the other

jungle animals, but when Timon and Pumbaa weren't missing him, he would go out to the desert and catch prey...the biggest being the size of a hare.

Timon, Iris, and Pumbaa did their best to teach him how to go through life; even Bunga helped him learn how to fight, being a tough and crafty teacher in spite of being smaller. Timon taught him about life in the jungle, and Pumbaa was his teacher when it came to stealth. In spite of his appearance, the warthog was a surprisingly good hunter, sneaking up on vultures for the guineafowl's eggs. With a smile, Simba remembered the first time Pumbaa brought him egg-hunting.

At first, Simba didn't heed Pumbaa's training and charged at the first vultures, confident that he had this in the bag. But the vultures had taken off, leaving a disappointed Simba behind on the ground.

"They're loud and ugly, but they're not stupid," Pumbaa had said. "You just gotta catch them off guard."

After that, Simba decided to heed Pumbaa's advice some more. Pumbaa had scared the vultures away by screaming, as well as Iris sneezed by accident, making the vultures abandon the guineafowl's egg. So the next time the vultures came back, Simba tried the same, only one rule is coming, and he had learned that his growl was getting deeper. This time the vultures were scared off, leaving two big white eggs from the guineafowl behind.

"Good job," Pumbaa had said when Simba got it right this time. "We hit the jackpot. Now let's go home."

Home. Home now meant the clearing that he shared with the

other animals, not Pride Rock anymore. Simba was more than happy to call this place home as well.

One day, it was a warm and dry morning in the jungle. The sun was partially blocked by the leaves and branches of the trees, leaving the temperature comfortable. It seemed that in this jungle, water never ran out, and the trees stayed green all year round. Any animal that wanted to pass through did pass through with little to no trouble, and those who wanted to stay had stayed.

A bongo antelope was grazing near the river's edge, flicking his tail. It had been a peaceful morning for him so far, and he liked it that way. He thought that he heard something slowly approaching him, from the bushes on the other side of the river. When he was sure that there was nothing, he began to drink from the river, though he still kept his eyes peeled.

Suddenly, a lion burst out from the undergrowth, jumping across the river and growling with fangs bared. The bongo screamed in terror and started to run off. But when the lion didn't chase him, he looked back. It was just Simba, now a fully-grown lion in the flesh. He was jumping up and down on his hind legs, soaked front paws batting at passing butterflies.

"Ha! I'm gonna get you! I'm gonna get you!" Simba cheered like a cub, trying to swat at the butterflies. "Well, I almost got you. I'll catch you later!" He turned around and noticed the bongo standing there, and he gave the antelope a grin. "Hey there. Did you see that? I almost caught a butterfly!"

"Simba?" The bongo sighed with relief. "Whew! It's just you. I'm glad it's you and not a real lion."

Simba perked his ears, curious.

"Uh," the bongo stammered, realizing his mistake, "I don't mean to say you're not real. I mean, you are real. It's just..."

More silence followed. Simba and the bongo stared at each other.

"...yeah, I'm gonna go," said the bongo. "Nice seeing you, Simba."

He sprang away, across the river and through the tall grass. "Hey, where you going?" Simba called after the antelope. "You wanna get some grubs?"

But the bongo did not reply, for he had disappeared from sight. Simba frowned. He didn't even get a chance to ask the antelope to have a snail-eating contest; he had already beaten Timon and wanted to try it on someone else. "What's up with that guy?" he wondered aloud to himself.

Then again, Simba had seen the way the antelope looked at him. The other animals in the jungle had been scared of him when he was a cub, but over the years, they began getting used to him. The bush baby and the elephant shrew were no longer scared of a yawn turned into a roar, sharpening his claws on a tree no longer frightened the Guinea fowl into squawking for their lives, and baring his teeth now invited Bunga to playfully tussle with him. Yet it was moments like what had happened with the bongo reminded him that he was still a lion at heart.

Even more obvious was how much he had grown up. He was

definitely the biggest animal in the jungle now, even though he was not the tallest (that belonged to some of the antelope). Like his father Mufasa, Simba had a reddish brown mane around his neck, though his mane was not as refined and groomed as Mufasa's had been. His teeth and claws had definitely grown sharper due to scratching and biting branches and bark to sharpen them.

Not far away, Timon and Pumbaa had been watching him. They had seen the interaction between their lion friend and the bongo, so they decided to help him out in their own way.

"Uh…Simba? How can I say this without sounding like a jerk?" Timon began, sauntering over to Simba. "He's prey. And a guy like him is never gonna wanna frolic with a guy like you. You know, you being a carnivore and all."

"You guys hang out with me. Some of the antelope and Guinea fowl are pretty friendly too," replied Simba, walking alongside them to their favorite termite picnic. He would always literally look down to Timon when they talked, but he could look down to Pumbaa now. "And you're all okay with me now. So what's the deal?"

As they walked, Timon jumped up onto Pumbaa's head, riding the rest of the way like this. "You see, kid…in nature, there's a delicate balance."

Simba frowned at that, recalling Mufasa teaching him about life in the Pride Lands. He hadn't thought about his father in a long time, or any of the things that Mufasa had taught him. There was one lesson, however, that had stuck to him like burrs on his fur, on the day he was shown the kingdom.

"Oh yeah, it's the Circle of Life," he replied, shaking off the sad feeling. "I know about that."

To his surprise, Timon and Pumbaa only laughed out loud. Simba was confused; did they know about the Circle of Life or not? Once they reached the termite mounds, where the other jungle animals had gathered, they began to talk.

"What circle? There's no circle of life," Timon explained once he stopped laughing. He scraped at the termite mound with his claws, rustling up some grubs. "I don't know where you got the circle from. In fact, it's the opposite."

"Yeah," added Pumbaa. "And our lives got better for it."

Timon looked away from his meal and looked down to Simba and Pumbaa. "You see...there's a straight line. It's the start of the Line of Meaningless Indifference. And as our big buddy Pumbaa here is gonna demonstrate," he added, giving Pumbaa a nod and patting his snout, "we all run on it with paralyzing fear."

With a cry, Pumbaa raced towards a tree, scaring the Guinea fowl foraging at its roots. The Guinea fowl squawked and fluttered up to the lowest branch, giving Pumbaa a sharp reproachful stare. Pumbaa didn't notice, having bumped his snout hard against the trunk.

"See? That's what life is," said Timon, satisfied that he was getting his point across. "It's a meaningless line."

"Of indifference," Pumbaa added, rubbing his snout with a hoof. "The Line of Meaningless Indifference. We all run from the start of the line to the end. And one day, we'll reach the

end of the line. That's about it."

Timon nodded. "Right you are, buddy. You can really just...do your own thing and take care of yourself, since your line won't affect anyone else. You're alive, and then you're not. Like this fella," he added, taking a bite out of a fat grub.

"You guys sure it's not a circle?" Simba asked, munching on a few grubs. He was pretty sure that it was a circle. With a deep breath, he hauled himself up the termite mound and murmured the same words his father had told him: "We're all connected in the great Circle of Life."

But that just confused the duo even more. "You're not making any sense!" Pumbaa cried. "A circle would mean that what I did matters to everyone else. Like when I hit that tree. That would have to matter to Bunga or Daabi or Bhati - "

"Or the grubs we're eating. Either way, it's ridiculous. Our business is our business," Timon added, waving a paw dismissively.

"And if you keep going in circles, that would make doing whatever you wanted not cool," added Pumbaa.

Timon nodded again. "Exactly. In simple terms, life is meaningless," he concluded. "That's why you gotta look after yourself. You do you. But that's enough of that." He dusted his paws, wiping away any dirt that had gotten on them. "Today, Simba, we're entrusting you to decide what we can all do today. This is important."

"Think about it, buddy," Pumbaa urged. "Remember all you learned."

Simba climbed up to the top of the termite mound, thinking it over. Now that his friends said it, following a line did sound more reasonable than following a circle. In a circle, there was too much worrying; a line, on the other hand, just lead to not much worrying.

When Simba didn't answer right away, Timon pressed, "Well? What do you wanna do today?"

Up to this point, there wasn't any guessing to what they were going to do. "Absolutely nothing?" Simba asked.

The duo's eyes flashed, and they grinned at each other. He was finally getting it, they thought happily.

The other animals seemed to join in, watching and waiting as Simba perched on top of the termite mound. "Go on, Simba," Bhati called out. "So the straight line leads to..."

"Absolutely nothing!" cried Simba with the attitude of a playful cub. And with a push of his powerful front paws, he smashed open the termite mound.

As the grubs and termites fell to the ground, the other animals cheered happily and ran over to gobble up the treats. Simba smiled before running over to join them, lapping some up with his tongue. At least a line of not caring much sounded better than a circle of caring too much.

The jungle was very peaceful at night. A day of doing nothing could take a lot out of someone, and it was time to top it off with more nothing. So Simba rested with Timon, Pumbaa, and Bunga in the middle of their clearing, relaxing under the stars

as they appeared in the night sky. Not much sound came from the jungle at night, nothing except night bird noises and crickets chirping.

And then, out of nowhere, Simba let out a big belch.

"Whoa!" Timon remarked with a chuckle. "Nice one, Simba."

"Thanks," Simba said with a grin. "Man, I'm stuffed. Must've been the termites."

"Or the crickets," Pumbaa added. "I ate like a pig!"

Simba snickered. "Pumbaa, you are a pig."

"That ain't nothing," Bunga added with a smirk. "Check this out."

He thumped his chest with a paw and let out a big belch. It wasn't as loud as Simba's, but it was still impressive. Simba and Pumbaa congratulated the honey badger, while Timon muttered with a grin, "Sheesh, and it's no wonder I sleep underground."

They spent a few minutes playfully arguing who could burp the loudest before deciding to just watch the stars. All four animals took a deep sigh and leaned back against the cooling grass, looking to the sky.

"Hey, Timon," Pumbaa said, looking over at the meerkat. "When you look up to the sky at night, you ever wonder what those sparkly dots are up there?"

Timon scoffed softly. "Pumbaa, I don't wonder; I know."

"Oh." Pumbaa blinked and gave Bunga a look, which was returned by a scoff. "What are they?"

"They're fireflies," guessed Timon, gesturing to the sky. "Fireflies that, uh…got stuck up on that big bluish-black thing."

Pumbaa nodded in understanding. "Oh…gee. Guess that makes sense. I always thought they were balls of gas burning billions of miles away."

This time, Timon rolled his eyes. "Everything comes back to gas for you, doesn't it? Bunga, what do you think they are?"

"Grubs," was all Bunga grunted. He had found some grubs crawling under the log he was resting on before digging in.

Then three pairs of eyes darted to the one who made no comment: Simba. He wasn't sure how to respond to all this. It sounded almost similar to what Mufasa told him years ago.

"What do you think they are, Simba?" Timon questioned the lion.

"Well…" Simba stalled a bit before shaking his head. "I don't know."

At this, the three others sat up and started asking him to, Pumbaa pleading. They even told him that they had already guessed theirs.

Finally, Simba gave his response, keeping his eyes on the stars. "Somebody once told me that the great kings of the

past are up there, watching over us."

"Really?" Pumbaa asked. His tone, to some, could mean either curiosity or a teasing tone.

"You mean a bunch of royal dead guys are watching us?" Timon added.

And then, he, Pumbaa, and Bunga started laughing. Their laughs split the night, drowning out the cricket noises. Timon rolled around, Pumbaa clutched his sides, and Bunga banged the ground with a paw as they all laughed. Only Simba didn't really join in this time.

"That's a good one!" Pumba chortled. "That's insane!"

"You ain't kidding! Who told you something like that, Simba? What kind of mook made that up?" Timon rasped from the laughing. "Seriously, buddy, be real! Why would those 'kings' want us? We're outcasts!"

"Yeah...it's pretty dumb, huh?" Simba replied with a weak chuckle.

Still, he still couldn't help but feeling sad. He knew that Timon and Pumbaa meant no offense or harm, but this just stirred up bad memories, of the life he had left behind and whom he left behind.

But the two weren't finished. What they said next even got his fur bristling.

"Royal dead guys! Hopefully, they don't fall out of the sky!" Timon cackled, slapping his knee. "Hold on, Your Majesty!"

"Yeah, hold on! Don't let go now!" Pumbaa chortled.

That was when Simba gave them a snarl, shutting them up. He usually liked their antics, but this was one that he didn't like at all, especially since it brought up his past. It even reminded him of one time when Timon almost fell over a waterfall when the crocodiles try to eat him, with Simba almost being too paralyzed with horror to save him. He had saved Timon, but he was still rattled by the event; it had reminded him of how Mufasa died.

With a sigh, Simba rolled onto his paws and left the clearing. "Sorry, guys. I gotta go," he called over his shoulder. "Gonna get some grubs or something."

As soon as Simba left, Timon and Pumbaa shared uneasy looks, the meerkat guilty and the warthog confused. "Was it something I said?" Timon asked.

"Yeah, it was. Both of you," Bunga growled. The honey badger had looked up from eating from his collection of honeycomb and bee larvae. "Hey, I'm not blaming you for that. That was one heck of a show you pulled."

Timon and Pumbaa shared guilty glances this time. They hadn't meant to be like that to Simba, and what Bunga said made them feel even worse. "Gee…we didn't mean to hurt his feelings," Timon said. "Just wanted to laugh, have some fun."

"How about we make it up to him tomorrow?" Pumbaa suggested. "We'll look for his favorite treats."

"I got a better idea than that," replied Timon. "We'll go out into the jungle tomorrow and look for his favorite treats."

Pumbaa grunted with confusion at Timon taking credit for his idea before merely nodding. That was what they were going to do tomorrow: looking for Simba's favorite grubs to eat.

Meanwhile, Simba arrived at the edge of the jungle, looking up to the night sky. He wasn't really angry at Timon and Pumbaa for what they said, and he wasn't angry at himself. If he was being honest...he felt sad. Memories of his life at Pride Rock, from playing with Nala to messing with Zazu and even to spending time with his parents, had kept him from fully enjoying the Hakuna Matata lifestyle. Yet everyone at Pride Rock would probably forgot about him anyway. The lionesses would be hunting, Zazu would be reporting the news to his mother, Scar would sulk as usual, and Nala would have moved on to a new playmate.

Simba was sure that Mufasa's voice was rattling at the back of his mind, only faintly. While Timon and Pumbaa were happy to do nothing all day, the voice kept telling Simba that he had to get up and do something. Yet he wasn't sure what to do. He wanted Mufasa to somehow appear beside him, to advise him and comfort him.

You promised you'd be there, Dad, whenever I needed you, Simba thought, feeling his eyes prickle with tears. I just need to hear your voice. One word, just a word, will do.

But no one answered him. Simba groaned with disappointment and wiped the tears away. It was nothing after all. The great kings of the past weren't real. They were just fireflies stuck up on a big bluish-black nothing.

With a sigh, Simba flopped down onto the ledge, his weight blowing milkweed floss away to the wind.

All of the jungle animals, Timon, Pumbaa, and the girls (Iris, Serena, and Valerie) begin to build the windmill. When the windmill was finished, there was a whoosh from the thunderstorm until the windmill stayed untouched. Suddenly, the thunderstorm not only hit the windmill but hit the trees in the jungle instead. Iris dashes like a roadrunner and explains to the girls and animals about the damage. "Guys! Over here! Do you know who is responsible for this? Do you know the enemy who has come in the night and overthrown our wildlife? SCAR!" she suddenly yelled like a peacock in a voice of thunder. "Scar had done this thing! On sheer malignity, thinking to set back our plans and avenge himself for his ignominious expulsion, this traitor has crept here under cover of night and destroyed our trees for nearly a year. Guys, here and now I pronounce the destruction upon Scar. We must have a multitude of polar bears and a large flock of vultures for any animal who brings Scar to justice. A full multitude to anyone who captures Scar alive! There is work to be done. This very morning we begin growing the trees with wildlife instead of the windmill, and we will grow all through the winter, rain or shine. Remember, guys, there must be an alteration in our plans: they shall be carried out to the day. Long live the tropics! Long live the wildlife! Long live North America!"

Tamino sat at the highest branch of her baobab tree, watching the land below her turn to ruin. Dark days were indeed upon the Pride Lands. Sadly, there was nothing Simba could do about it. When Simba refused to allow Scar to dismantle the Pride Lands' borders, Scar had him banished from Pride Rock.

The wind ruffled her long neck and the black and white feathers on her wings; however, in the dry season, the hot wind brought no relief. But something felt odd about the wind as if the spirits were telling her something. Tamino reached her wing up and snatched some milkweed floss from the wind, and then she took a sniff of them. Her hunch was right; there was an odd but familiar feeling about this.

Getting an idea, Tamino jumped down from her perch and reached the center of the baobab, where she did her work. She grabbed an orange juice bowl which she used to mix herbs into remedies and dropped the floss in it. As she rolled them together in the bowl, she hummed to herself before deciding to grab a peck to eat. A little snack will never hurt anybody, she thought as she pulled over a fruit and split it open. So as she casually used her long tongue as a giraffe and ate, she tried studying the pattern, wondering what this all added up to.

Suddenly, her eyes widened as the sign became clearer. She took a closer look at the floss...it couldn't be. But that was when she looked up and strained her eyes on the painting of Simba.

"...Simba?" she asked herself in amazement.

The sign was even clearer now. That was why the wind blew the floss over; the great kings of the past were telling her something: good news. Her heart filled with a rapture of sorts when she realized the truth.

"He's alive..." she squawked, joy and hope starting to revitalize her peacock feathers back to normal. "He's alive!

By the kings of the past, he's now alive! In the jungle!"

She wildly laughed, squawked, and hollered with joy as she ran to dip her fingers in reddish paint before running back to the painting of Simba. With loud laughter of joy and tears streaming down her long neck, she painted a new addition to the painting: a mane.

"It is time!" Tamino declared. She lifted her eyes up to the blue sky and prayed, "Thank you, spirits, thank you so much! Simba lives! Bless my journey to find him and bring him home."

With that, she started to gather traveling herbs, her falconry, and her staff, preparing for her journey.

Chapter 11

A good night's sleep did wonders for Simba's attitude the next morning. He felt more refreshed and ready to start the day. Today, after thinking about it over a late breakfast, he decided to actually do something instead of doing nothing all day. It didn't have to be big, something like a walk would do. Stretching his legs one by one, he walked away to find his friends.

When he found Timon and Pumbaa, they were swimming in the river. Timon was riding on top of Pumbaa's belly while the warthog did backstrokes. Simba called a good morning to them, and they waved back before paddling back to shore to greet him.

"Hey, we're sorry we laughed at you last night, Simba,"

Timon said, drying himself off with a leaf. "We were acting like a couple of jerks."

"Ah, Hakuna Matata. I'm feeling a lot better now," Simba replied, grooming himself. "What do you guys wanna do today?"

Pumbaa shook himself dry, his tail whisking about. "We were gonna help you find your favorite grubs," he explained, "to make up for last night. I still feel bad for us laughing at you, Simba."

"Then after that, we can relax in one of our secret hot springs," said Timon. "Do you wanna come with us?"

Simba nodded. "Sure. But can we take a walk first? I'd like to do a little something for once."

The pair nodded before Timon turned to Pumbaa. "Sure, why not? A little walk never killed anyone."

"Of course, a walk won't kill anyone," replied Simba with a teasing tone. "Besides, you two old farts can use some walking with your purple flower girl."

The trio shared an amused look before Iris shrugged. "Well, he's got me pegged. Let's get this walk started."

So that was what they did. It was a peaceful morning to go for a stroll. Simba appreciated the peace and quiet, allowing his thoughts to give way to the gentle breeze and the sound of water trickling down rocks. He even stopped to smell some flowers along the way, which made his tail tip twitch.

While they walked, Timon began singing a song, called "The Lion Sleeps Tonight". Pumbaa added the backup chants while Timon led the singing. They even got the other animals in the jungle to join them: first Daabi, then the antelope (both duiker), then the galago. Eventually, Bhati and the elephant shrew joined them, singing together and even dancing to the tune. Finally, Simba joined in by dragging out some of the tune, which Timon once accused him of "riffing".

However, Iris spotted her penguin and went her own way, wandering away from the group. She ended up at the edge of the jungle and near the savannah end, where she, Pumbaa, and Timon usually never went to. Up ahead, the penguin had jumped on a log and Iris slunk closer and closer until she could almost touch and pet him. With a smart idea, she jumped up onto the log, her hands digging into the bark.

A twig cracked, and Iris glanced behind her. "Timon? Pumbaa?" she called.

But there was no answer. Iris shrugged and started crawling up the log to see her penguin, unaware of her appearance. She had seen Simba try this when he was a cub, back when he had caught his first flying grub. She was getting closer and closer...

Suddenly, a lioness burst from the tall grass, roaring and baring her teeth. Iris screamed in terror, jumped down from the log, grabbed her pet penguin, and started running back into the jungle, the lioness hot on her heels, no matter how many turns she made. She ignored Timon's shouts of "IRIS!" from not too far away, running this way and that. Her luck turned for the worse, however, when she ended up getting stuck under the root of a large tree; there wasn't enough

room to fit an aardvark.

Fortunately, Timon was running up to her, eyes wild with concern. "Hey, what's going on?" he demanded.

"SHE'S GONNA EAT ME!" Iris and the galago screamed to Timon wildly.

Timon hopped up to the branch Iris was stuck under and looked at where Iris ran from. Timon was right; a lioness had been chasing the purple-haired girl, getting closer and closer.

"WHOA!" Timon yelled as he jumped to push Iris out from under the hollow tree root used for getting out. "Jeez, why do I always have to save your - AAAHHHH!"

The lioness had gotten closer and closer now. Just before the lioness could reach them, however, Simba leaped over the tree root and landed on her. The lioness looked surprised before Simba slammed her to the ground. In a few seconds, both lions were back on their paws, wrestling and grappling with each other. Their roars echoed in the jungle, startling and scaring the other animals that lived there.

"Don't worry, buddy, I'm here for ya. Everything's gonna be okay," Timon reassured Iris and Pumbaa, patting behind a wall of rocks and watching the fight. When he saw Simba briefly get the upper hand, he yelled, "Get her! Bite her head! Go for the jugular, the jugular!" Then he darted back to Pumbaa, adding with a grin, "See, I told you a lion would come in handy."

Meanwhile, the lions' grapples turned into wrestling. Simba saw the lioness rushing at him, so he reared on his hind legs

to slam his paws down on her shoulders, to prevent her from going for the throat. As Bunga had taught him, exposing the throat in a fight was not good...but Simba remembered that his belly was now exposed to attack. The lioness kicked him there, and the two wrestled on the ground until she pinned him, one paw on his neck and the other on his throat.

Then Simba recognized the lioness. He remembered seeing the teal eyes, the dark tan fur, and the way she had pounced. There was only one lion he knew who could pin him down like that. As the lioness continued to growl down at him, he choked out one name:

"Nala?"

The lioness's face immediately changed from anger to surprise as she got off of him, staring with jaws agape. Simba sat up, staring at the familiar creature. "Is it really you?"

"Who are you?" the lioness asked, confused.

"It's me. Simba," was the answer.

The lioness's eyes seemed to shine when the name rang in her ears. "Simba?"

Numb with joy, Simba nodded. And soon enough, Nala's face turned to pure joy as she and Simba greeted each other and jumped around like cubs. Timon was gawking at them, jaws wide open, ignoring Pumbaa asking if he wasn't going to be eaten after all.

"Simba! You're alive!" exclaimed Nala as they jumped around.

"It's so great to see you!" Simba cheered. "What're you doing here?"

"What am I doing here? What are you doing here?" Nala asked breathlessly.

They were so busy greeting each other and jumping that they hadn't noticed Timon walking over to them, demanding answers. After having avoided their trampling paws, he shouted, "HEY! WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE?!"

Both lions looked down at him. Simba couldn't keep the grin off his face as he introduced his friends to each other, "Nala, this is Timon. He's taken care of me while I was away. And Timon, this is Nala. She's my best friend!"

"Friend?" Timon repeated incredulously. "Some friend she is! She tried to eat Pumbaa!"

"I didn't know," Nala replied. "Any friend of Simba's is a friend of mine."

"Hey, Pumbaa! Get over here!" Simba called to Pumbaa. The warthog had joined Timon and Iris with her penguin and was now walking to them. "Nala, this is Pumbaa. Pumbaa, this is Nala."

"Nala's such a pretty name," said Pumbaa, smiling at the lioness who nearly ate him moments ago. "Pleased to meet your acquaintance."

Timon face-palmed and sighed. "Pumbaa, don't say 'meet' like that. She's gonna look at you like you're a rack of ribs!"

Nala, ignoring Timon, smiled back at Pumbaa. "The pleasure's all mine."

Simba had to admit that Timon hadn't been wrong before. Nala had really been into the hunt, chasing Pumbaa down like a savage. Hopefully, he could introduce his old friend to some grubs so that she wouldn't eat him or anyone else.

"Whoa, whoa! Time out!" Timon interrupted, bringing the chatter to an end. "Glad everyone's having some fun here, but let me get this straight. You know her. She knows you," he said, pointing to both lions. "But she wants to eat him," he said as he pointed to Pumbaa, who twitched an ear. "And everyone's okay with this? DID I MISS SOMETHING?!"

"Timon, relax," Simba chided him lightly, nudging him with his paw.

Nala was circling around Simba, admiring how he looked. "I still can't believe you're alive, Simba," she breathed. "And you look just like your father. If only he was alive to see you."

Hearing the reference to Mufasa almost made Simba frown, but he pushed it down the best he could. Then he circled around Nala in return, smiling and remarking, "And look at you. You've really changed."

"Wait till everyone finds out you've been here all this time," Nala said, her voice turning a little serious. "And your mother...what will she think?"

But far from reassuring him, Simba felt doubtful and even afraid. Did they even know that he had caused Mufasa's

death? It was even what Scar reminded him about what Sarabi would think if she found out that her son killed Mufasa.

"She doesn't have to know," he told her firmly. "Nobody has to know."

"Of course they do," said Nala. "Everyone thinks you're dead."

Simba was surprised. "They do?"

Nala nodded solemnly. "Yeah. Scar told us about the stampede. He became king after he told us this."

"He did?" Simba asked, even more, surprised. It was strange how Scar came to be on the throne so fast after Mufasa's death, and it didn't sound right; then again, he decided, Scar had been next in line to be king before Simba was born. Then he thought of what Scar would tell the pride about his role in the stampede, and he feared their reactions as well. "What else did he tell you?"

"What else matters? You're alive." Then Nala's eyes widened in realization, a hint of a smile on her face. "And that means, you're the king."

The old Simba would have felt happy at the thought of being king. In fact, his cub self's words "I just can't wait to be king!" rang in his ears like bats' squeaks in a cave. All in all, this sounded like his old dream was coming true.

But far from making Simba happy, it made him feel scared instead. He couldn't go back to Pride Rock, not after what he did; in fact, he didn't want to go back. He didn't belong there.

"Simba? King?" Timon scoffed, leaning against Simba's paw. "Lady, have you got your lions crossed!"

Nala's eyes narrowed. "No, I'm serious. Simba's the king."

Timon rolled his eyes and retorted, "Yeah, sure. He's the king, I'm the emperor, and Pumbaa is the Grand Poohmbah."

But Pumbaa was staring at Simba as if he were a grub too magnificent to eat. He got down to his knees until his snout nearly touched the ground. "King? I humbly bow before you, Your Majesty! I gravel at your feet!" he declared before trying to kiss his paws.

"Stop it," Simba muttered, pulling his paw away.

"It's not 'gravel'; it's 'grovel,'" Timon scolded Pumbaa. "And don't! He's not the king...are ya?"

"No, she's wrong," Simba snapped at them. "I'm not the king. Maybe I was gonna be, but that was a long time ago."

Simba no longer felt happy about the reunion. Things had gone from amazing to terrible in a few minutes. Seeing Nala again after all these years was amazing. But being reminded of his past, and how everyone would react to seeing him alive, was terrible.

"Let me get this straight. You were the king, and you never told us?" Timon asked, amazed. "We've taken care of a lyin' king for years?"

"Look, I'm still the same guy," Simba tried to reason.

"But with power!" Timon interrupted with a grin. "Like that crazy chick said, you're the king now!"

Nala bent her head down until she reached Timon's eye level. "Could you guys excuse us for a few minutes?"

Timon folded his arms in protest. "Hey, whatever she has to say, she can say in front of us. Right, Simba?"

Simba wasn't sure what to say at first. Of course, he trusted Timon and Pumbaa; not with his deep secret, of course, but he wouldn't tell anyone else in the jungle if something was wrong. But then again, he wanted to spend time with Nala again, after having not seen her for so long.

Finally, he replied, "Maybe you'd better go. I'll catch up with you guys later; I just wanna catch up with Nala first."

Timon stared at him, mouth agape. Then he rolled his eyes and started heading off. "It starts," he grumbled. "You think you know a guy..."

Pumbaa sighed, but he followed his best friend. While they were in the bushes, Simba heard Pumbaa say, "I knew he was a king all along, Timon. I felt it in my gut!"

"No, Pumbaa, that's gas," Timon bit back wryly. "And did you get a load of that? Aw great, now I gotta gravel."

"It's grovel," Pumbaa reminded him.

"Whatever!"

Simba chuckled as he watched them go. "Timon and Pumbaa. You learn to love 'em," he remarked.

But his smile faded when he saw Nala's reaction. She had looked away from Simba, a sad look on her face.

"What?" Simba asked, catching up to her. "Nala, what's wrong?"

"It's like you're back from the dead," Nala replied, looking around at him with a pained expression. "You don't know how much this will mean to everyone...what it means to me."

Simba smiled and brushed up against her. "Hey, it's okay now. I'm here."

To his surprise, Nala reached over and rubbed her head along Simba's neck. "I really missed you," she murmured.

"I missed you too," he rumbled, returning his friend's nuzzle.

In the time that Simba was reunited with her, Nala seemed different to him. She still had the same description from when she was a cub, but she seemed tougher, wise, and stronger. In fact, she looked like she had carried a heavy and terrible burden. With empathy for his best friend, Simba decided to help her out.

"Come on, I'll show you around the jungle. You look kinda tense," he urged her. "I'm telling you, you're gonna like it here."

With a nod from Nala, the two lions walked down the jungle path together.

Iris, Serena, and Valerie watched in amazement.

Chapter 12

In the bushes, Timon and Pumbaa watched Simba and Nala embrace. Timon felt completely disgusted by this, forcing down the urge to throw up. Here they were, enjoying life together with no rules and no worries. They were bachelors for life, not needing any love interests to tear them apart. It was just him, Timon, Simba, and the other animals in the jungle, and nothing would change that.

Of course, that was until she had to come along. With Nala coming into the picture, it looked like the paradise of Hakuna Matata was coming crashing down.

"I tell ya, Iris and Pumbaa, this stinks!" he grumbled.

Suddenly someone caught Pumbaa, Timon, and Iris's attention. It was Dawn. She came from Sinnoh and she blushed, as much as a reddish robin like Iris could. "Oh. Sorry."

"Not you, Iris and Dawn! Them!" Timon snapped. He pointed to where Simba and Nala were standing, as they were now leaving. "Him. Her. Alone."

"What's wrong with that?" Pumbaa asked curiously. "It just seems like they've finally found each other as two soulmates joined across the years by the bonds of true love."

Timon face-palmed and shook his head. "Sweet, innocent little Pumbaa...you don't see what's wrong with that? She's gonna put a stake right through the heart of our Hakuna Matata, that's what's wrong! If they fall in love, here's the bottom line: our trio's gonna go down to two!"

"Oh." Pumbaa blinked once before asking, "So...maybe we should follow them?"

"Nah, that's a stupid idea. Let's just follow them," Timon said, ignoring a grunt from Pumbaa. "We gotta be quiet, though. We're not gonna do anything drastic."

"Like prick their paws with thorns?"

"Nuh-uh."

"Drop a spider on them?"

"Nope."

"Throw a beehive at them?"

"Never."

"Trip them?"

"Maybe. I'll have to think about that one." Timon gave his own face a little slap as he ranted, "Never mind all that! Pumbaa, we gotta make sure that they don't feel the love tonight!"

He leaped over the log and started running where Simba and Nala had left. Pumbaa pondered over whether to join Timon

in spying on them or watch the lions enjoy their evening. In the end, though, he tagged along with Timon for the ride.

For the rest of the day until night, Simba had shown Nala around his jungle home. She could definitely see why Simba loved it here so much: the jungle was lush and green all year round, with plenty of water. If she had been in charge of Pride Rock, she would have brought the pride here until the dry season was over.

In the late afternoon sunlight, Simba looked much more regal, the sun turning his fur a bright golden. Nala knew that he was different not only in personality but also in looks. He looked strong, confident, and powerful enough to take care of himself. In fact, she saw that Simba looked very much like his father.

The sun was setting when Simba and Nala arrived by a waterfall by a lake. Unlike other waterfalls in the jungle, this waterfall split off into smaller sections that fell into ponds that hung over the lake. They darted among the smaller waterfalls, each daring the other to see who would go over the rocks the fastest. Once the two lions reached dry land, they crouched beside the water and began to drink.

There's a lot of things to tell her, Simba thought as he lapped up the cool water. He wanted to tell her about what he had done, opening his mouth, but then decided against it. Nah, that's impossible. She'd turn away from me.

Nala herself stopped drinking as she looked up at Simba. He appeared to be holding something back, but she couldn't decide what it was. Why won't he be the king I know he is, she thought, the king I see inside?

To her surprise, Simba darted away from her and into the brush, baffling Nala. A few seconds later, he came charging, jumping, and splashing into the water. Nala walked over to the edge of the water, curious until Simba reached up out of the water and pulled her in. The lioness coughed and sputtered as she paddled back to the shore.

"You jerk!" she gasped, pulling herself out of the water and panting. "What was that for?"

"Call that payback for pinning me down," Simba panted with a laugh, the water making his mane waterlogged and heavy. It even covered his eyes, but there was still a laughing smile on his muzzle.

Nala smirked and shoved Simba back into the water, sprinting toward where the trees ended. Simba climbed out of the water, shook the water from his fur this time, and sprang after her, laughing. They chased each other around the grassiest area in the jungle, stirring up flocks of birds. Not far away, Simba's antelope friends looked up from their grazing, staring before minding their own business. As long as no one was getting eaten, the lions could play there all they wanted.

Just as they reached the jungle again, Simba noticed Nala darting into the trees, winking at him over her shoulder. He thus went after her, his troubles out of his mind for the night. Simba headed deeper into the jungle, looking around for his friend until she surprised him by popping out from behind a rock and yelling "Gotcha!" She had surprised him, but he was fine with it and showed it with a hearty laugh, and she joined in.

Then Simba walked over to her and playfully pounced on her, just like when they were cubs. Nala laughed and wrestled with him as well, jumping around and playing. But while they started playing and wrestling together, they suddenly tripped and tumbled down to the shore. Simba had landed on top of Nala, pinning her to the ground, but they were both laughing.

While they laughed, Nala leaned her head up towards Simba, held her paw up to his face, and gently licked his cheek. Simba stared down at her in surprise, looking down at her as she gave him a seductive smile. But he was still unsure what to feel, except...was this how his own parents acted with each other? They were in love...and Simba found himself realizing that he and Nala were feeling the same way toward each other.

Nala rolled onto her paws and padded over, rubbing her body against his and nuzzling him, and he (still stunned) was able to try the same. She slipped through the bushes and made it to a clearing, looking up at the stars. During the night, she had wanted to tell Simba what exactly he was hiding, why he didn't want to return to Pride Rock, but he never answered. Still, it was hard to deny that being here on this night felt pretty good.

Rustling in the bushes made Nala spin around. Simba was coming out of the bushes, looking a total mess. He was covered with mud and grass, and he had two branches stuck in the sides of his mane, making him look a bit like an elephant without the tusks and trunk. In spite of it all, though, he was grinning like a fool. A charming fool, that is.

With a giggle, Nala walked over and plucked the branches out of his mane. Simba thanked her with a lick on the cheek,

which made her blush as he did when she had done the same to him. But the night was still young, which meant one more bout of fun...at least until he yawned loudly. All the fun seemed to take so much energy out of him, and she couldn't blame him; she felt tired as well.

So Simba led Nala back to the many-waterfall lake, padding along to a path behind the cascading water. Nala followed him into an open cave area that had glowing flowers along the wall, which glowed silver like earthbound stars. In the middle of the cave's lake was a large rock, covered with moss and grass. Simba climbed up to this rock and lay beside it, Nala falling in beside him and leaning against him.

For once, the world was in perfect harmony. They were definitely feeling the love tonight.

Not far away, Timon and Pumbaa were catching up to Simba and Nala the best they could. Before, the friends had listed what to distract the lions with so that they would not feel the love together, but it all happened to Timon. He got pricked by thorns, stuck in a spider's web (and trailing some web behind him), and was stung by bees.

"Well, that worked like a dream," he muttered, pulling the remnants of the web off.

"It did?" Pumbaa asked happily.

Timon rolled his eyes. While Pumbaa was indeed his best friend, he wasn't the smartest hog in the jungle. "Sarcasm is a foreign language to you, isn't it?" he grumbled.

But he stopped when he saw the two lions nuzzling. He nearly

felt his own heartache from sadness. Watching one of his best friends leave with a lion that nearly ate Pumbaa was too much to bear.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "She's making those eyes."

"He's smiling that smile," Pumbaa sniffled.

Timon tried to find more words as he started to become overcome with sadness. "They're laughing...and hugging, and...and..."

Then he dropped his arms to his sides, sighing sadly. "Well, it's happened, buddy. Simba's felt the love tonight."

"You mean his carefree days with us are history?" Pumbaa asked, pulling Timon close to him. Timon and Pumbaa lowered their heads down.

"Yeah, guys," sniffled Iris, hugging Dawn, Serena, and Valerie on top of the tree. "In sure our pal is doomed."

And with that, Iris, Dawn, and Serena started crying loudly like howling wolves and howler monkeys in a high-pitched chorus in a tree. However, they were crying right next to another girl, Kyururu from Japari Park. She gave them a stern glare before the girls sobbed themselves to sleep.

Simba and Nala had no idea how long they spent together in the jungle. The night seemed to go on forever, an endless night, wondering when the sun would rise again. So once they woke from their brief nap, they decided to head back to Timon and Pumbaa's clearing and sleep there.

But while Nala enjoyed herself with Simba (she had even tried some plump grubs at his request and found them okay), she couldn't get her mission out of her head. He was the perfect lion to bring back to Pride Rock, to save the lionesses from Scar's tyranny and overthrow Scar. She needed to find the right time to tell him the truth, and fast.

"Isn't this a great place?" Simba asked, breaking the silence. They were walking before a great waterfall, on a fallen log he and his friends often used.

"It is beautiful," responded Nala as she took in the scenery. She didn't want to ruin the night by telling Simba this, but he needed to know the truth. "But I don't understand something. You've been alive all this time. Why didn't you come back to Pride Rock?"

Simba paused before climbing into a hammock Timon had made, a hammock made of grass. "Well, I just needed to get out on my own, live my own life. And I did, and it's great!"

But to Simba's confusion, Nala gave him a sad look. "We've really needed you at home."

Simba only scoffed, which almost made Nala wince from how sad he sounded. "They're fine. Nobody needs me."

"Yes, we do," Nala retorted more forcefully. "Me, your mother, Zazu...everyone needs you. You're the king."

"Nala, we've been through this," Simba said sharply. "There's nothing I can do. I'm not the king; Scar is. Deal with it."

Nala felt a stab of anger at this defeatist attitude Simba was

showing. She was feeling angry at him, angry at Scar...heck, pretty much angry at everything at the moment. But she tried her best to keep her cool.

She reared up and rested her front paws on the hammock. "Simba, things have gotten worse ever since Scar became king. He let the hyenas take over the Pride Lands," she went on as Simba stared at her in shock. "Everything's destroyed. There's no food, no water...Simba, if you don't do something soon, everyone will starve. We have to go back home."

"No," he muttered, leaping down from the hammock. "I can't go back. Ever."

"Why?" Nala demanded. "Because of what happened at the gorge?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"What wouldn't I understand?"

"No, no, no," Simba backtracked, stumbling over his words. "It doesn't matter. Hakuna Matata."

"What?" Nala asked, confused. He was right; she didn't understand any of this, especially not that weird phrase he just uttered.

"Hakuna Matata," Simba repeated as if explaining a new game to her. "It means 'no worries'; it's something I learned out here. Look, sometimes bad things happen," he went on, irritably ignoring her protest, "and there's nothing you can do about it. So why worry?"

He walked away along the log, but Nala wasn't ready to give up. As she caught up with him, she replied, "Why worry? It's because it's your responsibility."

Simba stopped walking and stared down at her. "Well, what about you? You left the Pride Lands."

"I left to find help," she snapped, "and I found you. Don't you understand? You're our only hope."

But Simba wasn't going to listen to her anymore. Any of the good feeling he felt with Nala - even the romantic feeling - was dissipating fast. "Sorry," he scoffed before ready to move on.

Nala stood there, shocked. She had wanted to see the cub she had grown up with, the headstrong yet fun-loving cub destined to become king. But now he was a stranger, steadfast in not wanting to return and save his home because he wanted "no worries". The old Simba wouldn't have refused to fight.

"What's happened to you?" she rasped. "What happened to the cub who just couldn't wait to be king? You're not the Simba I remember."

"You're right. I'm not, and I never will be," Simba growled. "And that cub grew up. Are you satisfied?"

"No," retorted Nala. "Just disappointed."

"You know, you're starting to sound like my father," Simba snorted, jumping down from the log.

Nala scoffed in return while he walked away. "Good. At least one of us does."

That stopped Simba in his tracks. It stung him like a wasp's stinger, and the tension grew even thicker. Anger made his claws slide out, raking the ground, and the fur along his back bristling.

Furiously, he spun back around to confront Nala. "Listen! You think you can just show up here and tell me how to live my life?!" he snarled. "You don't even know what I've been through!"

"And you don't know how hard it is for all of us!" Nala snapped back. "I'd understand more if you just told me!"

"Forget it!"

"Fine!"

And at that, Simba stormed away. Nala snorted furiously, turning around and marching in the opposite way. She had come to the jungle to look for help, and when she found Simba alive and well, she had hoped with all her heart that he would return home. Now, after seeing how stubborn Simba was in not wanting to go back to Pride Rock, it turned out to be nothing but a waste of time.

For a brief moment, she hung back in the thickets, hoping that Simba would change his mind and come with her. Perhaps he would realize he was wrong and return to the Pride Lands with her. But all that she saw behind her was the deepening darkness of the night.

I'm leaving tomorrow, at first light, she thought, half angrily and half sadly. She would have to tell Sarabi that she found her son...only to lose him again.

Chapter 13

Once he was out of the jungle and far away from Nala, Simba paced angrily around the jungle's edge. Hearing Nala talk about how the Pride Lands were suffering, and how Scar didn't care at all when the land suffered, was breaking his heart all over again. For a wild moment, he wanted to go back with her, back to the Pride Lands and Pride Rock and to his mother.

But then he felt his claws sink deep into the ground, tearing up the grass. This was not the way he should be acting. He should be having no worries and no responsibilities, like Timon and Pumbaa. The past was in the past, and it needed to stay there. And now Nala had to come along and dig the past back out. Some friend she was, he thought angrily.

"'Disappointed?' Her?" Simba snorted, stomping through the grass. "And she wants me to go home? This is my home. I don't need friends like her. I don't need friends period. Never did."

Then he thought that he was being childish. As he had felt nights before, there was something in the back of his mind, needling him like a bee's sting. It was telling him that he had to do something, that Nala had a point in urging him to go back. Simba almost felt like listening, but then their argument quelled that thought immediately.

"She's wrong," he told himself aloud. "I can't go back home. What would it prove, anyway? You can't change the past."

Simba looked up at the sky, hoping to see Mufasa up there. The stars were silent. His father had said that the great kings of the past were watching over him. At first, when Nala returned to his life, he thought that they were still with him, but that changed when she urged him to come home. Now he felt like the lion spirits were taunting him, buzzing around in his mind like annoying flies.

"You said you'd always be there for me!" Simba shouted to the sky, his voice cracking. He hung his head and sat down. "But you're not. It's because of me. It's my fault." Tears were forming in his eyes as he felt the despair and shame well up inside of him. "It's my fault."

And with that, he hung his head and began to sob silently.

Suddenly, a voice from the trees pulled him briefly out of his misery. It sounded thunderous and rather loud, and it was also close by. The chanting went something like this: "Tama Te So, Aso, Ahelahela! Tama Te So, Aso, Ahelahela!”

Simba looked up at the branches of an acacia tree. It was the teenage red-crowned crane, chanting a song and shaking the branches, and she was brandishing a long stick with fruit at the end. He frowned, wanting to be alone for a bit. With a shake of his head, he stalked away, ignoring the peacock watching him with a wide grin on her face.
He walked on until he found a pond a little away from the trees of the jungle. Once he reached the log stretching out over the pond, he lay down upon it and stared down at the

murky water, frog croaks filling his ears. He was dreaming, he was sure of it. I'm hallucinating, and thinking about what Nala said isn't helping, he thought miserably. What are you supposed to say when Hakuna Matata doesn't work?

Just then, a small fruit landed in the water. Then, when Simba looked up at the trees with a glare, he heard the chanting again: "Tama Te So, Aso, Ahelahela! Tama Te So, Aso, Ahelahela!"

There was the peacock again but in a different tree this time, chanting and laughing. Simba rolled his eyes and snapped, "Come on, will you cut it out?"

"Can't cut it out. It will grow right back!" the peacock replied with a laugh.

Simba got up from his spot and began walking away. "You talented peacock!" he growled. But the peacock was following him now, further irritating her. "Stop following me! Who are you?"

The peacock darted over to stand in front of him. "I know exactly who I am. But the question is, who...are you?"

Simba rolled his eyes. "I'm nobody, okay? Now leave me alone."

"Everybody is a somebody," said the peacock sagely. "Even a nobody. And leaving you alone will not answer the question. Again, who are you?"

When Simba heard the question more clearly, he stopped in his tracks. For a while, he had asked himself the same

question. What kind of lion was he really?

"I thought I knew," he muttered, "but now I'm not so sure."

The peacock hobbled closer, her stick in one arm. "Well, I know who you are! Come here, it's a secret."

Simba leaned in, eager to hear something, a word of encouragement. But then the peacock started running and chanting, getting louder, "TAMA TE SO, ASO AHELAHELA!"

"Enough already!" Simba snarled at her, shaking him away. "What's that supposed to mean, anyway?"

"It means you're a peacock...and I'm not!" was the peacock's reply.

Simba groaned and began walking again away. "I think you're a little confused."

"Wrong!" the peacock said. "I'm not the one who's confused. You don't even know who you are!"

"Oh, and I suppose you know?" Simba grumbled, voice full of sarcasm as he started to storm away for the third time.

The teenage peacock loped forward until she was in front of Simba again, holding her stick, her bald eagle, and her birds of prey and humming an unfamiliar song. "Of course, I know. Sure do..." she replied from before when she stopped the humming.

Before those three words made Simba stop with a gasp, the jungle began growing quietly as he began to think. How could

this teenage peacock know about Mufasa? Mufasa was long dead by now.

It was then that a name rang in Simba's brain: Tamino. The peacock's name is Tamino! He remembered it all now: this was indeed Tamino, a friend of Mufasa's as well as the shaman of the Pride Lands. She had been the one to present Simba to the kingdom when he was a cub, as well as fascinating him with her eccentric behavior, fascinating stories, and sage wisdom.

"You're Mufasa's boy!" Tamino suddenly said.

"You knew my father?" Simba panted, sitting down.

"Correction: I know your father," said Tamino. "I even held you, the son of Mufasa, at the ceremony welcoming you to the Pride Lands."

When the bald eagle watched Simba, Simba decided that he would have to break the bad news to Tamino. "I hate to tell you this, but...he died. A long time ago."

"Nope! Wrong again!" Tamino suddenly declared, running over to some thick trees and thickets, laughing. "He's alive, and I will show him to you! Come on! I'll show him now! Come on down here! I'll take him to you! Come on!"

She slipped into the shadows of the undergrowth, and Simba followed. At first, he paused, unsure of how to enter. He seemed too big to slip through the roots that made the entrance. But after taking a deep breath and reminding himself that Mufasa could still be alive, he followed suit.

As a cub, he had slipped through thorn bushes before, getting little cuts and scrapes due to being smaller. But as an adult running through thick undergrowth, it slowed him down.

"Don't dawdle!" Tamino called from a tree branch above him. "Hurry up!"

"Wait, wait!" Simba cried out. "Will you slow down?!"

But Tamino will slow down. As a climbing and flying animal, she had the aerial advantage. She swung from vines and leaped from branch to branch with ease and flew like a macaw. For extra points, she grabbed her stick in with her talons as she grappled with vines and launched herself off branches and to the next.

Simba, however, was a ground animal and had to follow more slowly. He had to squeeze through spaces in low branches, break through vines, and trip over roots. Even tree branches were slapping against his face. Tamino's laughter bounced through the area, ringing in Simba's ears as he kept running and running. It was almost like a red fox was taunting him into running until he was exhausted...

"Stop! You trust teenage Tamino. She knows what she's talking about."

Simba slowed down in time, just as Tamino's wing held up for him to stop. With a shush, Tamino loped over to some reeds, beckoning for him to come closer. As she did, Simba saw that the teenage peacock was gesturing to another pond with a nod. "Look down there," was all Tamino said.

At first, Simba hung back. If Mufasa was alive, what would he

say to Simba? That he was angry with him? That he was disappointed in him for not saving him? But he felt that he was being silly. He had to try.

So Simba walked down to the water's edge. As he got there, he looked down into the water, a bullfrog's croaking ringing in his ears. He hadn't really taken a long look at his reflection, but when he did, he was surprised. He remembered Mufasa having golden fur, bright amber eyes, and a reddish brown mane. Staring back at him was a lion of the almost same description, except with darker eyes and a messier mane.

In other words, no Mufasa here.

"That's not my father," he murmured, looking back up. "That's just my reflection."

"No," Tamino replied, and she pointed a finger down to the water. "Look harder..."

So Simba did so, narrowing his eyes. A breeze drifted over the pond and rippled the water's clear surface. Not too soon after, though, Simba stumbled back, amazed. Instead of his own reflection, he saw Mufasa. His father's stern yet wise face shone brightly from the water, as bright as the morning sun.

"You see?" Tamino said quietly. "He lives in you."

The air seemed to smell like rain, sweet refreshing rain, and the wind ruffled Simba's mane. In the wind, he could hear a familiar voice rumble, "Simba..."

Simba perked up, looking towards the heavens as he felt

raindrops fall. It sent a shiver through his spine to hear that deep loving voice again, after all these years. "D-Dad?"

Indeed, it was Mufasa, appearing to him as a spirit. And as a spirit, he seemed to tower over Simba, taller than the giraffe and bigger like a rhino. He looked like a mix between star constellations and clouds, taking up most of the sky and twinkling. He even smelled like rain, and the rain suddenly came down as a storm, the wind picking up fiercely.

"Simba..." Mufasa's voice was warm yet sad at the same time, rumbling like thunder. "You have forgotten me."

"No," Simba rasped, eyes still wide as the wind and rain whipped past him. "How could I?"

Clouds began circling around Mufasa, giving way to what appeared to be a heavenly light. "You have forgotten who you are, and so, you have forgotten me," the great lion explained. "Look inside yourself, Simba. You are more than what you have become. You must take your place in the great Circle of Life."

"How can I go back? I'm not who I used to be," said Simba. It felt harder to admit this to Mufasa than it was to Nala and Tamino.

His father was here for him now, but he was still dead because of him.

"Remember who you are," rumbled Mufasa, his spirit now golden and radiant even as it rained. "You are my son and the one true king."

Simba wanted desperately to believe. A strong feeling like a roaring fire was surging in his veins, urging him to accept wholeheartedly. But then, doubt entered his mind, and Simba lowered his head.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "I don't know how."

When he lifted his head to the clouds again, Mufasa was not there, and the rain had stopped. Simba felt his heart start to break at having seen his father again only to disappear from sight. But suddenly, he felt the air around him grow warm, and he looked to the right.

Mufasa was there, but not as clouds or stars this time. He appeared to him in the form of a mortal lion, a lion made of the usual flesh and bone. A warm light seemed to radiate from the deceased king, as warm as the sun. The warmth felt so nice that Simba felt the wetness on his fur start to fade until he felt dry.

"When I was alive, I was proud of one thing," Mufasa replied, his shining eyes upon Simba. "And that was having you as my son."

Hearing this made Simba feel tears of joy run down his cheeks. More than anything in the world, he wanted to tell Mufasa that he had wanted to hear those words. He wanted to tell him about all that had happened, to ask him for the forgiveness for the sin he had committed. But more importantly of all, he wanted his father back.

"That was a long time ago," he rasped.

Mufasa smiled the warmest smile Simba had ever seen. "No,

Simba," he rumbled, embracing him. "That is forever."

Simba brushed his face against his father's fire-warm mane as father and son embraced. He felt like a cub again, tears now falling freely as he sobbed with joy.

"Remember who you are..." Simba felt Mufasa's embrace lessen and looked up. His father was slowly vanishing, becoming like the stars and clouds once more. He felt sadness again when he saw Mufasa being pulled back up into the heavens.

"No! Please!" Simba cried as he chased after his father. "Don't leave me again! Dad!"

"I never left you..." Mufasa's voice carried in the wind. "And I never will...remember..."

Finally, Simba could run no more and sat at the top of a hill, watching the clouds fade away. All that was left was the night sky above his head, shining with stars. It had all seemed like a dream, and yet it all seemed too real. He had finally seen his father again; of course, he wasn't alive, but he was still with Simba.

"HI BO! What was that?" Tamino's voice sounded behind Simba, laughing. The wise teenage peacock came up beside him, a smile on her brightly colored face. "The weather. It was peculiar, huh?"

Simba nodded, looking up to the sky again. "Yep. Looks like the winds are changing."

"Ah, yes." remarked Tamino with a nod, "Change is good."

"Yeah, but it's not easy," said Simba. "I know what I have to do. But going back means I'll have to face my past. I've been running from it for so long."

Suddenly, Tamino whacked Simba hard on the head with her staff. Simba jumped back, roaring, "Ow! Jeez, what was that for?!"

"It doesn't matter. It's in the past," replied Tamino, laughing.

"Yeah, but it still hurts," Simba grumbled, rubbing his head and checking for any bleeding. Fortunately, there was no sight of blood nor scent of it.

Tamino nodded and rested a hand on Simba's shoulder. "Oh yes, the past can hurt. But from the way I see it, you can either run from it or... you can learn from it."

She swung her staff at Simba again, but Simba was ready this time. Just as the staff was near his mane, he ducked out of the way.

"Ha! You see?" Tamino exclaimed. "Pretty easy, is it not?"

"Yeah," said Simba. He looked down at his paws, doubt starting to come into his head again. "But you knew my father. He was a great and powerful king; he'd have an idea of how to save the Pride Lands and restore the Circle of Life. I can never be like him."

"And he could never be like you. Mufasa's story may be over, but yours is just beginning. Every story in the world is different," explained Tamino, a serious look in Simba's eyes

this time. "But never forget Simba: He lives in you, he lives in me, and he watches over everything we see. Into the water, into the truth, and in your reflection."

Those words sent a chill through Simba's body, but it was a good chill. It reminded him of what Mufasa had told him years ago, that the great kings of the past would always watch over him and guide him. An ancient song seemed to vibrate through his body, making his heart thrill with a rapture unlike any he knew before. When he was sure to be lifted off the ground, the song left his body as soon as it had arrived.

Simba smiled and looked up to the heavens, feeling his eyes fill up with tears again. Mufasa was still there, and so were the kings of the past; they were with him all this time. They were still guiding his paw steps along the path of righteousness. While he didn't have the answer to how he would help the Pride Lands, he was done running from his problems. He was going to go back and save his kingdom.

"And so, I ask again." Tamino's words shook Simba awake. "Who are you?"

Simba lowered his head from the heavens to Tamino, a faint smile on Simba's muzzle and tear streaks running down Simba's cheeks. "I am Simba, son of Mufasa."

Tamino had a bright smile as she nodded. "Indeed you are, young lion, indeed you are the one true king of the Pride Lands. So what are you going to do now?"

Simba was now happy that Tamino had helped him see the truth. But he wanted just a little payback first with the staff Tamino had hit him with.

"First..." Simba crept closer to Tamino with a smirk. "I'm gonna take your stick!"

And with the speed of a cheetah and cobra, he snatched Tamino's staff and tossed it into the grass until the bald eagle played frisbee like a dog.

"No, no, no, no! Not the stick!" Tamino screamed, running to retrieve it. Once she got the staff and her falconry, she saw that Simba was already running off. "Hey! Where are you going?!"

"I'm going back!" Simba roared. "To save the Pride Lands!"

"Good!" Tamino shouted after him. "Go on! Get out of here!"

So Simba ran. He could hear the teenage red-crowned peacock laughing and screeching loudly, happy that Tamino had set the son of Mufasa on the right path again.

Once Simba reached the end of the jungle, he lifted his head and roared, a loud and proud roar so that the land, all of North America, or even the world could hear. It sounded even louder than it would have been back at the gorge. But Simba finished with another roar before running on, a fire in his heart. He was going home!

Chapter 14

The next morning was cool and calm. Nala had rested and felt refreshed, so she got to thinking. While she did want Simba to return home and take his place as king, she felt like

she had lost her temper, and said some things that should have been left behind. Thus, she decided to find Simba and makeup with him. Perhaps he could come back and live here if he wanted to after defeating Scar.

But when she woke up to find where he had vanished, he was gone. Even his scent had gotten stale; had it rained without her noticing? So she decided to try asking Timon and Pumbaa about where Simba was. They had watched him grow up over the years; perhaps they would know where he usually hung out.

As she walked into the clearing, Timon and Pumbaa were fast asleep. Timon was sleeping on Pumbaa's belly, curled up and as snug as a koala. Pumbaa was grunting and waving his legs in the air, muttering, "Grubs, grubs, grubs..." in his sleep. Nala walked over as quietly as she could, her paw steps muffled by the fallen leaves.

"Hey. You two," she whispered when she reached them, poking Timon with a paw. "Come on, wake up."

Timon snorted and lazily opened an eye. He was staring right into the eyes of a large lioness.

Suddenly, Timon and Pumbaa were up, screaming at the top of their lungs. Nala realized that she must have scared them by accident. "It's okay, it's okay!" she tried reassuring them. "It's only me!"

The two friends calmed down, and Timon rested a paw over his heart. "Don't ever do that again," he squawked like a macaw. "Carnivores...oy!"

The undergrowth rustled, and Bunga came bursting out, snarling. "Who's there? Let me at 'em!" the badger demanded, baring his teeth. "I'll rip their gizzard out!"

"Hopefully not my gizzard!" one of the Guinea fowl squawked. She and the rest of the animals had come over to see what the fuss was about.

"No, guys, calm down. It's just me," Nala reassured them, and they relaxed...but only slightly. "Anyway, have any of you seen Simba?"

"I thought he was with you," Timon griped. Around them, the other animals gave similar answers.

Nala shook her head. "He was, but now I can't find him."

"Oh! You won't find him here!" a new voice cried out, laughing.

All of the animals looked up to see Tamino perched on a tree not too far away. With a smile, of course, the teenage red-crowned crane added, "The king has returned!"

Nala felt overcome with relief and excitement. Simba was going back to the Pride Lands. She wasn't sure what drove him to it, but it didn't matter. Pride Rock, the lionesses that lived there, and the rest of the Pride Lands were going to be saved.

But when they looked up to see Tamino and ask her more, they were baffled. Tamino had left just as soon as she had arrived.

"Hey! What's going on here?!" Timon demanded. "What's with the peacock?!"

Nala lifted her eyes down from where Tamino had been. "Simba's gone back to challenge Scar."

"Who?" asked Timon.

"Scar."

"Who's got a scar?" asked Pumbaa.

"No, no, no. It's his uncle."

"Wait, the peacock's his uncle?" asked Timon.

"No!" Nala snapped. "Simba's gone back to challenge his uncle to take his place as king."

The two nodded in understanding, now getting what was going on.

"Ohhh…"

Valerie and Serena saw the branch where Tamino was sitting.

Serena gasped in shock. "She's gone? What do you mean, she's gone?"

"It's just like the peacock said. The king has returned." Nala replied.

Serena was right! It was Tamino that took off from the branch.

Nala went over the whole thing again. In their heads, several thoughts ran through Timon and Pumbaa.

"Poor Simba. The treachery... the villainy... the sheer indescribable horror!" Pumbaa replied to Nala.

"Blah, blah, blah. Why is she toying with us? She tried to eat us!" Timon replied to Pumbaa.

"Why are we doing this? This is a woman's suffrage debate NOT telling!" yelled Iris like a snow leopard's growl with a peacock's squawk politely to Nala.

Again, Timon and Pumbaa were dumbfounded. Iris stood up and gave the Ten Commandments for George's Wild Animal Kingdom.

"Guys! We have a decision. We will almost remember what I told you!"

She gave out the Ten Commandments on tablets to Timon, Pumbaa, Nala, Bunga, and the jungle animals.

"One, whatever goes on spots or has sharp teeth in an enemy. Our enemy is the pack of hyenas and Outsiders."

Timon said to Iris. "These hyenas and Outsider lions are the enemies of the Pride Lands."

"Two, whatever goes on four legs, two legs, scales, or has wings, is a friend."

The guineafowl squawked in excitement. "We are your comrades, Iris!"

"Three, we women shall wear clothes.

"We do!" said Serena. Iris continued her commandments.

"Four, we women shall sleep in a bed.

"I sleep in a bed too!" said Kyururu to Iris in her Australian and New Zealand voice.

"Five, no animal and woman shall drink alcohol BUT you shall drink water, juice, and Sprite.

"That's right! No more alcohol! We will never drink alcohol!" said the galago jumping up and down.

"Sixth, we will never kill another animal or person. If any animal gets killed like Simba as a cub running to the desert, the hyenas will kill and eat all of our friends!"

A terrible gasp and the yells of "No! Not our friends! Our hotel will be protected from storms and predatory animals!" came from Bunga, Timon, Pumbaa, the girls, and the jungle animals.

"That's it! That's it! Our hotel!" Iris shouted in joy. She then continued the last four commandments. "Seven, no animal shall commit adultery.

Eight, No animal shall worship any graven image.

Nine, No animal shall bear false witness and steal anything.

And lastly, ten! All people and beasts are equal!"

The animals and the girls began cheering for Iris and her Ten Commandments. The guineafowl clapped and squawked for Iris as well.

Hearing the cheers, Nala was shouting in frustration. "Ohhhh! Don't you get it? Simba needs us! Now!" When the shouting and clapping had stopped, Nala ran off to find Simba.

So at this, Serena, Kyururu, Dawn, Iris, and Serena began joining the other jungle animals to talk about it.

"I'll come and help," said Pumbaa, trotting to where Nala had left. "Are you with me, Timon?"

To his surprise, Timon shook his head. "Well, I was gonna say about Simba 'Don't hit the branches on the way out. Leave Hakuna Matata to those who appreciate it,'" he snapped. "Seriously, why would we leave us?!"

"Because he's got something to do," Pumbaa reasoned. "Besides, it's not Hakuna Matata without Simba."

"Not Hakuna Matata?" Timon repeated. "What's gotten into you? We've had Hakuna Matata before Simba, and we've still got it now!"

Pumbaa wasn't swayed. "We have to go help him, Timon. He's our friend."

Timon groaned and face-palmed conflicted. "I know we gotta help Simba, but...seriously? You, Pumbaa?" he went on, acting defensive. "You're just gonna walk away from the good life, give up on all this? Whatever happened to 'friends stick together to the end?' Whatever happened to Hakuna Matata?!"

Pumbaa stepped back, shaking his head in disappointment. "I was going to ask you the same thing," he retorted. "There comes a time in life when one must take fate into one's own hands. And like Simba, who marches towards the face of death, I too will march towards my destiny as his friend. So if you won't help Simba, then I will."

Timon rubbed the back of his head as Pumbaa began to walk away. He started to feel guilty for arguing with his best friend, and he felt even more ashamed. Pumbaa was right: Simba was their friend and adopted child, and he needed all the help he can get. Perhaps those nutty kings of the past were onto something if they were to go save a kingdom.

"Well... let's all go crazy! Hey, Pumbaa, wait for me!" Timon called, jumping down from the root. Pumbaa looked back at him, surprised, as Timon caught up with him. "You're right. Usually, I'm happy to admit when you're wrong, but right now, you're right. We've raised that kid together, and now we'll help him on this epic quest thing."

"And friends stick together to the end?" Pumbaa asked with a smile.

"Yep. Friends stick together to the end," replied Timon. smiling back. He darted over and jumped up onto Pumbaa's head, saying, "Now come on. We've got lions to catch up to and a kingdom to help save."

But they weren't going alone, the four of them. The rest of the jungle animals were on their tail as well, from Daabi to Bhati and even to the Guinea fowl. Even Bunga tagged along, looking more serious than anyone had seen him. Altogether, twelve animals ran together to catch up with Simba and save the Pride Lands. Iris, Dawn, Serena, Valerie, and Kyururu followed them.

Ever since Nala had shown up, things had been leading up to this point. Simba had to return to the Pride Lands and save his kingdom from Scar or die trying.

The lush and green jungle had faded away to the vast and dry desert, as well as the soft green jungle floor gave way to the hard and rocky desert ground. Simba kept running, the

sun blazing over him and the land. He had made the journey before when he was a cub, when he was lost, alone, and far from home. In spite of having grown up, he still barely remembered the journey. Yet he was all too aware of the changing landscape, which slowly changed from desert to eventual savannah.

When he approached the borders of the Pride Lands, the sky had gotten dark. Thunder rolled, spelling the upcoming storm and the rain to come with it. Simba guessed that the dry season was going to come to an end soon; it made him uneasy, but determination kept him going. Taking a deep breath, he pushed past the long-abandoned border and back into the home where he had been born.

But what he saw when he set paw in the Pride Lands horrified him.

Nala had been right; the Pride Lands had been brought to ruin. What had once been a lush and plentiful ecosystem was now dry and barren, the plants near dead and the land abandoned. Not even reptiles came lurking around, and no birds were singing but the screeching of vultures. It got even worse when he saw Pride Rock from a distance: it looked like it was marked as a grave site for the Pride Lands, a dying land. And it was all thanks to Scar; he and his hyena army had decimated everything. Simba was going to go to Pride Rock and make Scar realize what he had done, to fight him for the kingdom.

Who am I kidding? Simba suddenly found himself thinking, lowering his gaze. Doubt was starting to creep into his mind when he had seen the desolation of the land. Who am I to come back and try to right the wrongs of the world? Dad would've known how to do it, to save the Pride Lands and restore the Circle of Life. He looked up to the darkening sky, imagining roaring up to the heavens. I'm not you, Dad! I can never be you!

Then he tried shaking the doubt away. He couldn't let it cloud his mind, heart, and soul. Tamino's words came back to him: Mufasa couldn't be like him either. He was alive now, to help bring balance back to this land. I have to remember who I am. I am Simba, son of Mufasa, and the one true king of the Pride Lands. Remember...

"Simba! Wait up!"

It was Nala. The young lioness had caught up to him, joining him on the rock. Behind her, Timon and Pumbaa had caught up with the lions. Simba had never imagined the two of them wanting to head into danger.

"We're here!" Pumbaa announced.

"Oh, everyone, calm down!" Timon shouted. "We're here!"

"The backup has arrived!" added Pumbaa.

"Hey," Simba greeted them with a smile. "What're you three doing here?"

"At your service, Your Majesty," Pumbaa said dramatically, kneeling to the ground. Ever since Simba had been shown to be a king, the warthog had already started treating him like royalty.

"Dying was gonna be my first guess," growled a familiar voice. Bunga had come up from behind the pair, a battle-ready scowl on his face.

Timon hopped off of Pumbaa's head. "We came here because - not because we're worried, because Hakuna Matata and all that," he said with a nervous chuckle. "But...we were concerned about you. You're our friend, and we're all a part of that circle thingy."

"And friends stick together to the end," Pumbaa added.

Simba almost smirked. "What about that line of meaningless indifference?"

"Er...maybe it curves a little bit," admitted Timon. "Anyway, we're here for you now."

"Yeah, what's it look like?" Bunga added. "We're taking as many hyenas, jackals, and vultures as we can to the grave. If

you need an army, kid, then you've got an army. We all got your back."

All? Simba guessed, baffled. But then he saw that Timon, Pumbaa, and Bunga weren't alone. All of the friends he had made in the jungle were standing at attention, from Daabi and Bhati to the more timid animals like the antelope and the Guinea fowl. One of these animals included the bongo he had accidentally frightened. Iris, Serena, Valerie, Dawn, and Kyururu begin to realize they joined their animal sidekicks. Finally, there were two meerkats Simba didn't recognize riding on Pumbaa with Timon; one was stout and motherly, while the other was thin and grumpy.

Simba was amazed at how many animals had come. He had never expected them all to leave their comfortable lives behind and help him. Now here they were, standing beside each other as they came to a place they didn't know to fight an enemy they hadn't seen. But then again, they were all friends, and as Timon and Pumbaa said, friends stuck together till the end.

"By the way, Simba," said Timon, "remember me mentioning my Ma and Uncle Max? Well, we met them in the desert, and we made up. So Simba, this is Ma and Uncle Max. Ma and Uncle Max, Simba."

Simba approached them, and the meerkats greeted Simba by tapping his nose with their paws. "Timon's told us as much about you as he could, Simba," said the stout meerkat, which

was Timon's Ma. "We'd like to help you too. Just imagine, Max: we're helping Timmy help the Lion King!"

"Never knew Tee-moan had hung out with predators for so long," remarked the thin meerkat named Uncle Max. "Color me surprised and impressed."

The returning prince nodded his greetings and turned back to the landscape. It still brought sorrow to his heart the more he looked over his old home.

Nala sat with him, looking at the damage with him. "It's awful, isn't it?"

Simba looked back at the ruined scenery. "I didn't want to believe you," he confessed. "I'm sorry."

Nala merely nodded, her eyes tender. "What made you come back? What will you do now?"

That got Simba thinking. He knew what he was going to do. Tamino had asked him who he was, and he was even more certain now. He was the son of Mufasa, and he was not going to turn his back on his father's kingdom.

"I got some sense knocked into me. That, and I got the bump on my head to prove it," Simba joked, referring when Tamino smacked him upside the head with her staff. "Besides, this is

my home, my kingdom. My father once told me to protect everything the light touches, to be the first servant for the kingdom. If I don't fight for it, who will?"

No one, he had thought to himself. If he had stayed in the jungle and lazed around forever, there would be no one left to challenge Scar.

"I'll help fight," Nala said as she walked to stand beside him.

"It's gonna be dangerous," Simba told her.

Nala snorted with amusement. "Dangerous? I laugh in the face of danger. Ha ha ha!"

Hearing this, Simba almost smiled. That reminded him of when they were cubs in the elephant graveyard when Simba had done the same thing: laughing in the face of literal danger. It didn't matter if the laugh was cynical compared to when they were cubs, it soothed their souls again. Right now, Simba felt like they were best friends again, helping each other through thick and thin.

"I'm fine with danger," replied Bunga. "That jungle's softened me up. I could use a fight to liven up again."

"Like I just told Nala, it'll be dangerous," Simba reminded him. "Scar's going to have an even bigger army."

Bunga grinned. "I don't care. I don't give a darn," he said. "Simba, I said once that lions were nothing but trouble. But seeing the things you've done and me teaching you, it was worth the trouble."

"I see nothing funny about what Nala said," Timon remarked, looking miffed before looking out at the ruined Pridelands. He had a look of revulsion as he said, "Ergh...we're gonna fight your uncle for this?"

Simba was not irritated by Timon's scathing tone. He was used to the meerkat being the wisecrack of the gang. He looked back out to the Pride Lands, saying, "Yes, Timon. This is my home."

"Would your home include the big pointy rock way over there?" Pumbaa added.

"Yep," replied Simba. "All the way over there."

"Ah...talk about your fixer-upper. Love what you've done with the place, though I think you went a little heavy on the carcasses," Timon remarked. Then he said with a genuinely kind tone, "Well Simba. If it's that important to you, we're with ya to the end."

As Simba gave Timon a grateful smile, he heard a voice squawk from above their heads, a familiar posh voice. "Simba?" it exclaimed. "Are my eyes deceiving me?"

The animals looked up at the tree they were standing near. Simba could hardly believe what he was seeing. There was Zazu, perched on one of the lower branches of the dead tree. Nala had told him that he had been banished from Pride Rock for offending Scar, and he looked like he was doing the best he could to take care of himself. Timon and Pumbaa spotted Zazu on the branch, the former remarking, "Hey look, a bird." Timon replied, "Oh wow, it's a puffin!"

Simba smiled back up at Zazu. "Hey there, Mister Banana Beak," he replied with a chuckle, using the old nickname with affection. "Seriously, Zazu, I'm really glad to see you again."

"As I live and breathe...you're here, Simba. You're alive!" Zazu cried with joy, flying down to stand before Simba. "And how much you look like your father! He would most certainly be very proud of you." He bowed low before Simba as he had done for Mufasa in the past, spreading his wings out. "Whatever mission you're doing, let it be known that I will help you. We are with you until the end, Your Majesty."

In the past, Simba had constantly teased Zazu when the bird had been doing his duty. Now he was just happy to see that his father's old friend was still alive and well.

He dipped his head towards Zazu. "Thank you. And thank you all," he added, turning his attention to the other animals. "It's going to mean a lot to the Pride Lands if you're willing to fight for its sovereignty, to bring the Circle of Life back. Take a good long look at the animal next to you; there may be a chance that they'll go down fighting. Anyone willing to take a stand step towards me."

Nala and Zazu immediately took a step forward, as did Bunga. After a brief hesitation, Timon, Pumbaa, and Timon's mother and uncle stepped forward. Eventually, the other animals did the same.

Suddenly, something caught Simba's attention. It was a polar bear walking on his hind legs! The polar bears have their marabou, vulture, and jackal army. The sea lions in the dolphin's pool let out tremendous chanting of "Four legs good, two legs BETTER! Four legs good, two legs BETTER! Four legs good, two legs BETTER! Four legs good, two legs BETTER!"

Then, the thunderous barking having come to an end from the sea lions, they leaped up and splashed like dolphins indeed. "Simba is baaack home!"

So that was enough for Simba. While he didn't have a grand army, he could ask for no better animals to fight alongside him than them. Turning, he looked back out to the dying land as the clouds began to roll in. It was time to dethrone Scar once and for all.

Chapter 15

As Simba and his titanic army of human girls and animals slowly approached Pride Rock, he got the feeling that he had bitten off more than he could chew. They had all made it across the plains without being detected by the hyenas. He knew that hyenas could probably smell them out, but he must have gotten lucky. Not too long, and they had made it near the bottom of Pride Rock.

But when they reached the actual bottom of Pride Rock, their luck had run out. More hyenas were guarding the place, alert and looking rather well-fed. The hyenas back in his day had been rather thin and angry. Here, though, they looked healthier and relaxed. Simba motioned for everyone to get behind a rock, and they all watched as the hyenas showed no signs of moving from their posts.

"Hyenas everywhere. I hate hyenas," Timon griped, and Ma and Uncle Max agreed. Where they had come from, their colony had always been invaded by hyenas.

The elephant shrew gulped. "We're dead. We're so dead."

"Looking back, I kinda wasted my time on grooming," added the galago nervously.

"Hey, it might not be so bad, guys," Pumbaa tried reassuring the other animals. "Maybe it'll be a quick death. You know, just not a lot of chewing."

Timon shuddered; that thought did not help at all. He sidled up to Simba and whispered, "So what's your plan for getting past all those slobbering guards?"

"Live bait," Simba whispered back.

"Great idea," said Timon with a grin. But then he caught on to the plan and added indignantly, "Hey!"

"Come on, Timon," Simba snapped. "One or two of you need to create a diversion!"

Timon scoffed. "What do you want me to do anyway? Dress in drag and do the hula?"

"That's a good idea, Simba," said Pumbaa. "Those guys can never resist fresh meat. Now, all we have to do is find something big and plump and juicy, maybe a gnu..." He was met by many pairs of eyes turning their gaze to him. "...why's everyone looking at me?"

"Because it's you," Timon said, patting Pumbaa on the shoulder. "Well...nice knowing you, buddy."

Pumbaa glared back indignantly. "Hey, if I'm gonna be bait, then you'll have to be bait with me."

"You just had to play that card, didn't you?" Timon grumbled, but he went with Pumbaa anyway.

Once Timon was on Pumbaa's back, Pumbaa stood up straight and trotted out into the clearing where the hyenas were. That was the plan: Timon and Pumbaa would march out to where the hyenas were and distract them, to make them chase them and clear the way. At first, they did so by tiptoeing, Pumbaa whistling something Timon once called "Tiptoeing Through The Tulips".

Suddenly, Timon grabbed a stick and started banging it hard on a nearby rock. "Are ya achin' for some bacon?!" he called out, as loudly as he could. "Wanna dine on some tasty swine?! Step right up, step right up, and stand in line! Whoooo's hungry?!"

"Y-Yeah!" Pumbaa added nervously. Iris sneezed by accident as she did with the vultures. Iris called out. "We are the two juicy sidekicks! W-W-Wanna eat me?"

Immediately, the hyenas perked up, staring at these two animals and one woman in amazement. As long as they had been in the Pride Lands, their prey had always fled before them. Now here were two animals - one an appetizer and the other a meal fit for an army - deliberately stepping out to face them.

"Ma chère, monsieurs and mademoiselles," Timon announced in a foreign accent, smiling as he climbed up to perch on Pumbaa's head, "it is with deepest pride and greatest pleasure that we welcome you today. And now we invite you to relax and pull up a seat, as we proudly present...your dinner."

The hyenas began to slobber. Once he got their undivided attention, Timon started to sing while Pumbaa prepared to flee. "Be...our...guests, be our guests, put our service to the TAAAAAAH!!!"

But they screamed as the hyenas lunged at them. As fast as the wind could carry them, Timon and Pumbaa fled in the opposite direction of Pride Rock, taking as much of the hyenas with them as they could. Ma and Uncle Max watched them go with horror at the thought of them being caught, but Daabi and Bhati reassured them that they were fast on their feet.

Once Timon and Pumbaa led the hyenas away, Simba, Nala, Bunga, and the jungle animals crept ever closer to Pride Rock. Zazu perched on Simba's back, shuffling close to his mane so that he was hidden from view.

"Nala, you find my mother and rally the lionesses," Simba instructed her. "Bunga, you go with her and tell them that you're a friend. I'm gonna go look for Scar."

"Got it," Bunga replied, and he and Nala ran off.

"Bhat abou' us, Bimba?" Daabi asked.

"Yeah, what can we do?" Bhati added in her thoughts as well. "We want to help."

"All of you go with Nala and Bunga. Nala will tell the other lionesses that you're friends of mine. As long as you're friends of mine, no one here will eat you." The animals nodded and ran off, and before Zazu could take off, Simba asked, "Hey, do you know where Scar is?"

"At this time of day, he should be at the edge of Pride Rock," Zazu informed him. "If you'd like, I can escort you there, young master, almost like old times. But I must stay out of sight."

For the first time ever, Simba was now happy to have Zazu following him. He nodded to the hornbill, and they went off together. Iris joined the girls and then the girls stayed in the rock.

While they searched for Scar, Zazu filled him in on what had happened, including Scar trying to force Sarabi to be his mate. Because Nala had left for help, Scar punished the lionesses for it. From now on, he had said, they were forbidden from eating from any carcasses again. Their meat would have to come in scraps. The lionesses had suffered

because of this, and Zazu even mentioned that a cub had died from malnutrition.

Hearing all this made Simba's fur bristle. Scar literally had no care for anyone except himself...and maybe the hyenas, if their being well-fed was anything. His uncle was taking things way too far. The land in the Pride Lands was dying, and the pride was suffering, but he was paying no attention.

"SARABI!"

Simba looked up in a time when he heard his uncle's roar. By instinct, Zazu gulped and hid in a hole in a nearby tree. As for Simba, he peered around a rock, hidden from the eyes of Scar and his hyenas, as he saw a saddening sight.

As Zazu had said, Scar was standing at the edge of Pride Rock with Zira at his side, glaring down at the crowd of hyenas gathering at the bottom. Going through the crowd below was his own mother. The former queen of the Pridelands looked way too skinny for comfort, every rib showing through her dull tawny coat. She was walking through the huge crowd of hyenas, who were swarming around her. They even had the nerve to snap at her paws as she walked!

"Where's our food?!" one hyena sneered.

"Yeah, we're hungry!" another hyena snarled.

Yet Sarabi walked on, giving the hyenas a cold glare as she walked by them. For being in despair, she seemed determined to not let the hyenas bother her. Zira gave Scar a simpering smile and muttered something to him before taking her to leave, heading for the cave in Pride Rock.

Simba felt shame well up inside him when he saw his mother approach Scar. Had his running away caused Sarabi to become a slave? Every muscle in his body screamed to jump down there and fight as many hyenas as he could to save his mother. But he couldn't yet.

"Sarabi," Scar crooned, his eyes and tone full of malice. "Seeing you starve is breaking my heart. You cannot live on scraps forever. All you have to do, to let you and the others eat, is to be my queen."

Zazu had mentioned that Scar had tried to seduce Sarabi, and now that Simba saw this, he knew that the majordomo was right. Scar was forcing his mother to be his queen.

The lioness shook her head wearily. "It's over, Scar. Can't you see that?"

The simpering smile Scar had on his muzzle was replaced with a frown. He stalked forward until he was nose-to-nose with Sarabi. "You're suffering for what?" he asked with a jeer.

"Don't tell me: you still long for a life that you will never live again. You still pine after a lion you used to love..."

"Still love," Sarabi snapped back.

"Don't you get it?" Scar growled. "Here I am, trying to make you see what a true king is like, and you are throwing it away!"

Sarabi looked away, not meeting his gaze. This act just seemed to irritate Scar even more.

"Forget that then. Let's get down to business. Where is your hunting party so that the hyenas can eat?" Scar demanded, starting to pace around the lioness. "They're not doing their job! If they don't hunt, they don't eat."

"Scar, there is no food. The herds have moved on," said Sarabi calmly in spite of facing Scar.

"No!" snapped Scar. "You're just not looking hard enough!"

Sarabi did not even sigh at his attitude. She calmly went on, "It's over. There is nothing left. We have only one choice. We must leave Pride Rock."

"We're not going anywhere!" hissed Scar, whirling around on her.

"Then you have sentenced us all to death!" Sarabi snapped, her patience finally running out.

Scar sniffed. "Then so be it!" he said, turning his back on her.

Sarabi let out a snarl. Scar was willing to let the kingdom die slowly if it meant holding on to his arrogance; it was clearer than before that he was nothing more than a petty tyrant. "You can't do that!" she hissed.

"I'm the king, I can do whatever I want!" Scar bit back, sounding a lot like a spoiled cub. "I make the rules, so you have to do as I say!"

Simba winced at the attitude. He had had the same attitude when he was a cub, though it was because he had not understood the full idea of being king. But Scar was a fully-grown lion wielding his power around like a cub pouncing on an insect. Was this what I would've become? Simba thought in horror.

"If you were half the king Mufasa was - " Sarabi began furiously.

"I'm ten times the king Mufasa was!" Scar roared furiously. "And I will prove it with my claws!"

Then with another roar, he suddenly swiped his paw at Sarabi, knocking her to the ground. But as soon as Sarabi hit the ground, she quickly rolled onto her paws, glaring hatefully at Scar. Simba - who had nearly gotten up from the spot in anger at this - hung back, waiting to see what his mother would do next.

"Scar, a true king's strength is his compassion," Sarabi began, anger smoldering in her eyes like burning embers. "He does not let his kingdom fall, nor does he neglect it. When his kingdom suffers, a true king does everything he can to set things right and to help those in need, to make his kingdom great again, and to restore it to what it once stood for. In the years that you have been king, Scar," she pressed on, rage now simmering in her voice, "you have done none of that. Mufasa has shown himself to be that king, much more the king than you wish you could be!"

Scar snarled with a hint of a whine. "Mufasa, Mufasa, I'm sick to death of hearing about him! I told you never to mention that name!"

"I will say the name whenever," Sarabi snarled back. "You are nothing compared to Mufasa, and you never will be!"

It was too late to back out now. Scar roared again and lunged at Sarabi, who met him with her own claws and teeth. The

pride watched in shock as their queen and Scar bit and scratched each other viciously. In spite of her fighting prowess, however, Sarabi had gotten weak from hunger and thirst, tiring out quickly. With a sneer, Scar reached out and smacked her with his paw again, knocking her down completely this time.

That did it for Simba. Watching his mother take that kind of abuse was more than enough to bear. He jumped out on top of a rock before them and let out a monstrous roar, lightning flashing behind him. "GET AWAY FROM HER!" he bellowed.

"M-Mufasa?" Scar was rasping in shock and fear as he noticed the rage on Simba's face. Simba climbed down, and the older male started backing away with horror. "N-no! No! You're dead! How is it possible? Tell me! Are you a ghost or a demon? Have you come to finish me off, brother? Have mercy! Forgive me!"

Simba ignored him, but as he passed him, he thought, Scar, what's happened to you? He ran over to his mother, looking up at Zazu, who had flown from the tree to one of the rocks out of the hyenas' reach and now gazed at Sarabi with concern. So he gave the bird a small nod before turning back to Sarabi, and he gave her a gentle nudge.

While he waited for Sarabi to stir, Simba looked up to glare at Scar. He had hoped to talk with his uncle as peacefully as they could. But after having seen him mistreat his mother like that, that was not going to happen anytime soon.

Finally, Sarabi opened her eyes and looked up. "M-Mufasa?" she asked, confused.

Simba shook his head, realizing that she was mistaking him for his father. "No, Mom. It's me."

"S-Simba? You're alive?" his mother murmured, shock and joy on her face. "How can that be?"

"It doesn't matter," Simba replied, nuzzling her. "I'm home."

He was happy to be with her again, to be the son he hadn't been in years. So happy that he did not notice a certain lion watching from a distance.

"You're not Mufasa...Simba?"

The young lion looked up. Scar was watching with astonishment before a sly smile spread across his muzzle. "Simba! What a surprise to see you! Alive," he added with a snarl, turning his head.

The hyenas, whom he had been glaring at, gulped and ducked. Kamari and Azizi seemed to be arguing about something with Shenzi, though she shut them up with a snap of her jaws.

Simba glared at Scar, anger burning in his heart. While Sarabi and the lionesses were emaciated and starving, Scar looked more well-fed and rested. He stalked towards his uncle, snarling, "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't rip you apart."

"I can give you plenty of reasons," Scar chuckled nervously, backing up from his furious nephew. "Simba, my dear nephew, you must understand! The pressures of ruling a kingdom - "

" - are no longer yours," Simba interrupted. "Step down, Scar."

His uncle was up against the rock wall now as he cowered. "Oh, I would if I could, but...you see them?"

Growling noises made Simba look up. The large pack of hyenas was perched on rock ledges, saliva dripping from their mouths and teeth glittering in the dark. Nala had told him about the hyena army, and he had seen Shenzi and her posse from the elephant graveyard. But with that many hyenas, he grew worried.

"They think I'm king," Scar finished with a smarmy smile.

"Well, we don't!" Both lions turned to see Nala and Bunga helping pick Sarabi off of the ground. "Simba is the rightful

king," Nala added with a glare as some more lionesses rallied beside them. "If you want to get him, you have to get through us. Are you with me, lions?" Most of the lionesses in the pride roar, agreeing with Nala. Timon and Pumbaa were there as well, along with all of the animals that had come with them from the jungle. Iris, Serena, Valerie, Kyururu, and Dawn arrived to join them.

Zazu finally flew down, ignoring an angry growl from Scar, until he was right in front of Sarabi. He was fussing over the queen like a mother bird caring for her hatchlings, while Sarabi reassured him that she was fine. As for the lionesses, their eyes were shining with hope when they saw Simba for the first time in years.

"The choice is yours, Scar," Simba growled, turning back to Scar. "Either stand down or fight."

But Scar suddenly smiled widely, though it looked rather sinister. "Must this all end in violence?" he asked, playing the politician. "I'd really hate to bring about the death of a family member, to feel the shame of knowing that I took a loved one's life. Wouldn't you agree, Simba?"

"That's not going to work, Scar," snapped Simba as he stood his ground. "I've put it behind me."

"And what about your loyal subjects?" Scar asked, looking around at the lionesses. "Have they put it behind them? Do they even know what you've done?"

"Simba, what's he talking about?" Nala asked.

At this, Simba bit back a groan. He should have told her about what really happened at the gorge, and how Scar would turn the past against him. But he had been afraid to see any uncertainty in her eyes, and she was showing that now.

Scar's smile grew wider as he circled around Simba. "Ah, so you haven't told them your little secret. Well, Simba," he went on, his voice getting louder, "now's your chance to tell them! Tell them who's responsible for Mufasa's death!"

The crowd fell silent, the lionesses having their eyes on Simba. They were full of shock, unable to form the words they wanted to say. Simba felt like a heavy load was dropped onto his back. There was no need to hide the truth anymore.

"I am," he said, lifting his head up. "I caused Mufasa's death."

Everyone gasped, from the lionesses to his friends. Then Sarabi stepped forward, her eyes and face full of sadness. "It's not true," she whispered, her voice hoarse. "Tell me it's not true!"

Simba lowered his gaze, unable to witness the misery in his mother's eyes. "It's true."

"You see?!" Scar suddenly roared before Sarabi could say something else. "He admits it! Murderer!"

"No, it was an accident!" Simba pleaded, looking around at the lionesses. "I'm sorry!"

"If it weren't for you, Mufasa would still be alive!" snarled Scar, circling around him. "It's your fault he's dead! Do you deny it?"

"No," replied Simba, his voice ringing out louder than the thunder above them.

"Then you're guilty!" Scar screamed.

"No, I'm not a murderer!" Simba shouted back. He could feel his heart pounding faster than it had in a long time, and the lionesses' horrified looks burned hotter than a fire. "It was an accident! A terrible accident!"

Sarabi stepped forward, facing her king. "Scar, we should let him explain," she tried to reason. "He was only a cub when it happened - "

Scar ignored her and turned to the other lionesses, who still looked too shocked to say anything. "So we should believe a son who takes the life of his king, a son who murders his

father? A boy who abandons his mother?" Without an answer, he stalked toward Simba and swiped his claws across his face.

"No," Simba stammered, the blood dripping down his face. He couldn't fight back, not when he was in the sight of the shocked faces of the lionesses. "No, I'm - "

"You're what?" sneered Scar, swiping his claws at him again and again. "A king? Go on, say it! ARE YOU THE KING? SAY IT!"

As Scar kept up his attack, Simba kept seeing images of that horrible day, seeing Mufasa falling to his death in the stampede. It made him feel like a cub again, a helpless little cub, unable to do anything to save his father. And he was feeling it now, unable to prevent Scar from attacking him any further.

Finally, he hung his head, eyes full of tears. "I-I'm nothing," he mewled, his voice hoarse with grief and shame.

"Then bow to your king!" Scar sneered. He had stopped his attack, but he was now backing Simba up near the edge of Pride Rock. "Looks like you're in trouble again, Simba. But this time, Daddy isn't here to save you. And now, everyone knows why!"

Having backed up against the ledge, Simba had no idea how far he was pushed. But he got a taste of it when he felt his back paws slip down, and he clung onto the rock with his claws. He heard Nala shout "SIMBA!" just as lightning flashed above them.

This time, however, the lightning struck the underbrush below Pride Rock. It had been dry for a very long time, vulnerable if lit on fire. And lo and behold, the dry grass and undergrowth were set aflame, and the fire started to spread around Pride Rock.

Scar loomed over Simba and smirked, his scar looking more pronounced than ever in the light of the fire. "Now this looks familiar. Where have I seen this before? Hmm...let me think," he said mockingly.

Simba didn't know what to say. He struggled to sink his claws deeper into the rock, to avoid falling into the fire.

"Oh yes," Scar said jeeringly, "now I remember. This is just the way your father looked before he died. I looked down and saw the fear in his eyes." He sank his claws into Simba's paws, which made Simba roar in pain and leaned in towards his ear. "And now here's my little secret."

And he muttered three words that completely shook Simba to the core.

"I killed Mufasa."

Chapter 16

The words kept playing in Simba's head like an echo in a cave: I killed Mufasa...I killed Mufasa. When he looked up at the triumphant grin on Scar's face, he now knew that it was the truth.

He wasn't guilty after all. He hadn't caused Mufasa's death. It was Scar who had done it. He had a chance to save his own brother from the fall, but instead, he let him fall...that, or shoved him down. Either way, it was Scar who killed Mufasa; all of this was on him. Despair was now replaced by a fiery rage, and he now felt hatred for the uncle whom he had once been friendly with.

As Scar crooned, "Goodnight, sweet prince!" and prepared to shove him down to the fire, Simba acted just in time. He roared loudly and surged upward to grab his uncle by the mane with his teeth, catching Scar off guard. The older lion awkwardly pulled backwards and ended up pulling Simba back up, which resulted in Simba lunging and pinning Scar to the rock, causing gasps of surprise to come from the lionesses. Hyenas swarmed over to protect their leader from the younger lion, waiting with the lionesses to see what would happen next. Suddenly, there was a tremendous terrible baying of jackals and a shrill crowing from the black cockerel.

"Murderer!" Simba roared, his paws pinning Scar down. "He was my father, your flesh and blood! How could you?!"

Scar gasped and struggled under Simba's weight. "There, you see?! First he kills Mufasa, and now he wants to kill me!"

"MURDERER!" Simba screamed a second time. "TELL THEM THE TRUTH!"

"Don't believe his lies!" Scar roared in anger.

Then Sarabi stepped forward. Her disappointment in Scar for nearly flinging her son off of Pride Rock was now replaced by anger. "Scar, you told us that you didn't get to the gorge in time," she growled.

Scar gulped. "Yes. That's true."

"Then how did you see the fear in Mufasa's eyes?" Sarabi pressed on with a snarl. Something hadn't felt right to Sarabi; there was no way that Scar had seen the fear in Mufasa's eyes when he said that he hadn't gotten to the gorge in time. And when she overheard Scar saying 'saw the fear in his eyes', it had made her even more suspicious.

"You heard her, Scar. Tell them the truth," Simba snarled. "Or should I do it?"

"Truth?" Scar simpered with a sickening smarmy smile. "But truth is in the eye of the beho - " But he was cut off as Simba slammed a paw down hard on his throat, making him choke. "A-all right...all right! I did it. I admit it."

"So they can hear you," spat Simba.

With deep hatred burning in his eyes, Scar roared, "I KILLED MUFASA!"

Simba got off of him, while the skinnier lion tried to slip away. But all that met him were the faces of angry lionesses. He was caught. Everything Scar had told them and Simba was a lie. He was the reason why Simba ran away from home, why the Pride Lands were in ruins, and why Mufasa was dead.

"You traitor," Sarabi said in red anger, pure anger and sorrow on her face. "I guessed there was something behind Mufasa's death, but I never thought you were the actual one behind it. You were never fit to be king, let alone deserving of the title of king. Mufasa was always twice the king you were, and you murdered him for it."

Scar backed away, watching as the lionesses and other animals started moving toward him. He and Simba glared at each other, Simba's body pulsing with rage and triumph.

Near the Pridelands without fire, loud laughter and bursts of singing came from the Marriott hotel.

And suddenly, at the sound of the mingled voices, the lionesses were stricken with curiosity. What could be happening in there, now that for the first time animals and human beings were meeting on terms of equality? With one accord they began to creep as quietly as possible into the savannah.

At the gate, they paused, half frightened to go on but one of the lionesses led the way in. They tiptoed up to the hotel, and such lionesses as were tall enough like giraffes and cheetahs peered in at the hotel window. There, round the long table, sat half a dozen girls and half a dozen of the more eminent jackals, marabous, polar bears, and vultures, Serena herself occupying the seat of honour at the head of the table. The polar bears appeared completely at ease in their chairs. The company had been enjoying eating waffles, syrup, pancakes, and steak but had broken off for the moment, evidently in order to drink a toast.

Iris had stood up, with her Sprite in her hand. “In a moment I would ask you girls, polar bears, marabous, jackals, and vultures to drink a toast.” She announced. But before doing so, there were a few words that she felt it incumbent upon her to say.

“There had been a time-not that we, or any of the present company, had shared such sentiments-but there had been a time when the respected proprietors of George’s Wild Animal Kingdom had been regarded, I would not say with hostility, but perhaps with a certain measure of misgiving, by our penguins. Unfortunate incidents had occurred, and mistaken ideas had been current. It had been felt that the existence of a zoo owned and operated by construction builders was somehow abnormal and was liable to have an unsettling effect in the neighborhood. Too many polar bears had

assumed, without due inquiry, that in such a zoo a spirit of license and indiscipline would prevail. They had been nervous about the effects upon our own animals including cheetahs, leopards, ostriches, and sea lions, and even upon their human employees. But all such doubts were now dispelled. Today I and my friends had met Simba visited George’s Wild Animal Kingdom and inspected every inch of it with our own eyes, and what did we find? Not only the most up-to-date methods, but a discipline and an orderliness which should be an example to all of you in our hotel.”

Iris, Serena, Valerie, and Kyururu, got many ideas in which order to drink a toast, during which the polar bear's various chins turned white, but she managed to get it out: "If you have your lower animals to contend with," she said, "we have our lower classes!" This bon mot set the table in a roar of laughter; and Iris once again congratulated the girls, polar bears, marabous, vultures, the black cockerel, and jackals on the low rations, the long working hours, and the general absence of pampering which she had observed on George's Wild Animal Kingdom.

"And now," Iris said finally, "I would like you to rise to your feet and make certain that your glasses were full. Guys!" concluded Iris, "Guys, I give you a toast: To the prosperity of George's Wild Animal Kingdom!"

But then, a sickening smile came across Scar's face. Scar heard Iris’s speech from the hotel. Looking behind him, he turned to his hyena army and roared, "KILL THEM ALL!" That was when it all erupted into chaos. There was enthusiastic cheering and stamping of feet coming from the girls, polar bears, jackals, marabous, the black cockerel, and vultures in

the entire hotel. Serena was so gratified that she left her place and came round the table to clink her Sprite against Iris's before emptying it. When the cheering had died down, Serena, who had remained on her feet, intimated that she too had a few words to say. Meanwhile, Scar's hyena army surged forward, charging at Simba while Scar slipped away. With a roar, Simba swiped his claws at a few hyenas coming his way, catching a few on their muzzles. Two had gotten around him and crunched down on his hind legs, making him roar in pain, and the rest of the hyenas charged and knocked Simba down. The lionesses - now boldened and enraged by the truth - lunged into battle, biting and scratching as much hyenas as they could to make them release Simba.

In moments, all of Pride Rock was alive with the roars and cackles of battling lions and hyenas. Simba dove into the battle, slashing at hyenas left and right to reach Nala and Sarabi, who were back-to-back and holding their own; they were going to pay the hyenas back for making their lives as hellish as possible. The smoke from the fire filled the air and burned their lungs, threatening to further weaken the lionesses, but they had gotten their spirit and resolve back.

A small swarm of hyenas managed to dogpile Simba, trying to tear at his ears and throat. Simba was roaring in pure fury when a familiar stick swung down and swatted a hyena away. When Simba looked up, he saw teenage Tamino standing on a ledge, screeching a battle cry and jumping down to join the battle. She stared down the hyenas before kicking and chopping any that got close to her, even backhanding one.

"They shall not pass," Tamino told Simba with a manic grin. "Now go help your pride, my king."

With a nod, Simba raced off to find more hyenas to fight.

As he ran, he spotted Nala biting into the spine of one hyena when another came rushing at her. She realized that she was staring into the eyes of Shenzi, the leader of the entire hyena clan. Said the hyena ran over and sank her fangs into Nala's shoulder, while Nala roared and kicked at Shenzi's belly, using her claws to strike back. Once the hyena let go, Nala sat down, protecting the base of her spine in case the hyenas decided to paralyze her.

"Well, lookie here! Looks like you've come a long way, girlie!" Shenzi snickered, stalking around Nala. "This is a meal I've been waitin' years for."

"You can try all you'd like," Nala snarled back. "I've waited for this moment too. And I'm not a cub anymore!"

Thus, both the lioness and hyena rushed at each other. Simba realized that Nala was indeed a superior fighter and let her fight, knowing that she was very capable of defending herself.

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, Serena made a speech.

"I had only one criticism," she said, to make of Iris's excellent and neighborly speech. Iris had referred throughout to George's Wild Animal Kingdom. "I could not of course know- for I, myself, was only now for the first time announcing that the name George's Wild Animal Kingdom had been abolished. Henceforward the animal theme park, aviary, aquarium, and zoo was to be known as Serena's Wild Animal Kingdom - which, I believe, was the zoo's correct and new name."

"Guys," concluded Serena, "I will give you the same toast as before George's Wild Animal Kingdom, but in a newer form. Fill your glasses to the brim. Guys, here is my toast: To the prosperity of my name of the zoo, Serena's Wild Animal Kingdom!"

There was the loudest roar of cheering like Iris's speech from the polar bears, the black cockerel. marabous, vultures, jackals, and the girls, and the Sprite were emptied to the dregs.

But as the lionesses outside gazed at the scene, it seemed to them that some strange thing was happening. What was it that had altered the faces of the polar bears? One of the lioness's sharp keen eyes flitted from one face to another. Some of them had one chin, some had two, some had three, some had four, some had five, some had six, some had seven, some have eight and some have nine. But what was it that seemed to be melting and changing?

It was an uproar of voices and they were coming from the hotel! The sea lions in their dolphin pool looked at the hotel.

Yes, a violent quarrel was in progress. There were shoutings, bangings on the table, sharp suspicious glances, and furious denials.

The source of the trouble appeared to be that Serena, Iris, Kyururu, Dawn, Valerie, and the polar bears had each fought against the Sprite and other food as well. Twelve or more voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the polar bears.

The sea lions in the dolphin pool looked from follower to minister and from minister to follower, and from follower to minister again. The sea lions heard a loud squawk coming from the sky. It was Zazu and the guineafowl!

"For king and country!" Zazu squawked in the air near the outside of the hotel, swooping down on hyenas led by Shenzi's minions. He pecked furiously at Azizi's head, making him yelp and whine as he tried snapping at the hornbill. Next to him, the Guinea fowl divebombed any hyenas they could, staying close to the rocks so that they wouldn't get eaten.

But Kamari managed to finally swat Zazu down until he hit the ground pretty hard, earning him a cackle from Azizi. The Guinea fowl squawked in alarm and fluttered down to assist the hornbill. In doing that, however, they ended up being surrounded by the hyenas too.

"Gentlemen, please!" Zazu squawked, backing into a corner with the guinea fowl. "Can't we just talk this out like civilized animals?"

Soon after Serena's speech, the loudest ovation of clapping having come to an end as a reply to Zazu, the girls, polar bears, jackals, marabous, and vultures went outside of the hotel and started the blending-in game that had been interrupted, and the lionesses continued the fighting.

Just before Kamari could get his jaws on Zazu, Bunga barreled into him, knocking him away from Zazu. In spite of being outnumbered and smaller than them, the honey badger kept snapping and biting at any hyenas that came closer. He even slashed at a hyena's head with his claws before grabbing it and dropping down to the ground in a sitting position, leaving the hyena reeling.

He wasn't alone. Bhati, Daabi, and the antelope came running forward, scratching and biting and butting anywhere they could. Even the elephant shrew and the galago jumped on their backs, biting their ears and stomping on their heads.

"We'll hold 'em off, old timer!" Bunga called to Zazu. "You get to safety! What I'm gonna say is stupid, but this battle is un-Bunga-lievable!"

"What about you, honey badger?" Zazu asked. "Will you be all right? There are more hyenas than you!"

Bunga gave him a grin. "Well, I don't care," he chuckled. "I don't give a darn. We'll handle it from here."

So Zazu and the fowl flapped away, and the jungle animals continued their battle. This was not relaxing at all to them, but they had felt a fire in their hearts when they fought for the first time ever. And once Kamari and Azizi had gotten enough pecked enough, they ran off to find their leader and fight beside her.

Another battle took place not far away from them. Timon was trying to keep out of biting range of pursuing hyenas, led by Banzai and Ed. He tried throwing rocks at them, kicking dirt in their eyes, and even tried insulting them with corny jokes. The hyenas managed to chase him into a cave until he was backing up against a wildebeest ribcage.

"I'm begging ya," Timon gasped dramatically, dropping to his knees, "please don't eat me!"

"Problem?" a voice spoke from the cave entrance, and everyone turned. It was Pumbaa.

"Hey, who's the pig?" Banzai chuckled.

Suddenly, Pumbaa glared intensely at the hyenas, unnerving them. "Are you talkin' to me?"

"Uh-oh, you called him a pig," Timon muttered to the hyenas.

"Are you talkin' to me?"

"Shouldn't have done that."

"ARE YOU TALKIN' TO ME?!"

"Now you're in for it."

"THEY CALL ME..." Iris interrupted Pumbaa screamed like her toast before joining the girls, polar bears, marabous, jackals, and vultures together in one gigantic voice, "THE NEW OVERCOMERS!" Then they charged with an ear-splitting "YAAAAAAAAAAHH!"

What happened next was mayhem. Pumbaa was tossing around hyenas with his tusks, grunting and stabbing angrily. Timon was not far behind, jumping up and grabbing one of Banzai's ears with his teeth, and he bit down until the hyena thrashed and tore away from him. Together, the two friends chased the hyenas out of the cave and towards where the battle took place.

"Sheesh! Slow down, will ya, fatso?" Banzai snapped, panting.

Again, Pumbaa seemed to bristle. "Did he call me fat?" he asked Timon.

Timon nodded, adding a very annoyed "Oi vey!" as he face-palmed.

"Yeah, I heard him, Timon! He called me fat, which is a big mistake!" Pumbaa snorted, pawing the ground. "Let me tell you right now, hyenas, that only my friends can call me fat! And only they can call me a pig! I might run from hyenas, but I'll always fight a bully!"

With a yell, he charged at the remaining hyenas, tossing Banzai and Ed aside with his tusks and making the other hyenas retreat. Once those hyenas were backed into a corner, the ground opened up with a crack, and the hyenas went sliding down a tunnel created by the crumbling dirt.

"Thanks, Ma," Timon called down the tunnel. "Thanks, Uncle Max."

His mother and uncle climbed out, Ma giving him a rather bone-crushing hug. "I'm just glad we got to see you again, Timmy," she replied with a smile. "I love you so much!"

Timon smiled weakly. "Love ya too, Ma...not breathing..."

Ma released her son, and Uncle Max clapped a paw on Timon's back, a proud look on his face. "Well, Tee-moan," he declared as he and Timon exchanged smiles, "that stupid idea of yours wasn't stupid after all. It really worked! I'm proud of you!"

Pumbaa walked over and let Timon climb onto his back. As he did, Timon declared, "You know, I love the smell of Pumbaa in the morning. Smells like victory. Got that out of your system, buddy?"

"Yep," said Pumbaa. "I feel a lot better."

"Good," replied Timon. "This is never gonna get old. Now let's go kick some bad-pested hyenas!"

With a double yell, they charged toward the crowd of hyenas, bowling and knocking more out of the way. On that day, they decided that Bowling For Hyenas was a much better game than Catching the Vultures.

The girls, polar bears, jackals, marabous, and vultures led by Iris with her penguin and the black cockerel began forming a giant Pteranodon flying around Pride Rock.

When the lionesses saw the giant Pteranodon, Nala had left to fight alongside Simba, leaving Sarabi briefly alone. Fortunately, Sarafina had noticed this and ran to help her friend in fighting some more hyenas. They slashed and bit

some more, but just when Sarafina was about to finish one off, Zira suddenly lunged out of the crowd and grabbed a hold of Sarafina's pelt with her claws.

Sarabi was not surprised at all that Zira sided with Scar during this fight. Even when her old friends were in danger, Zira still chose to be disloyal and side with a tyrant like Scar. With a roar, she spun around on the younger lioness, slamming her to the ground. The older lionesses stood side-by-side while Zira spun around on the ground until she got to her paws.

"Traitors!" Zira screeched when the Pteranodon screeched and soared above them, her eyes mad and her claws sliding out followed by the terrible baying sound of dogs and the screeching of vultures when Zira's anger with the baying and screeching growing louder and louder. "You've ruined everything! You've betrayed Scar!"

"Scar was the one who betrayed us all," Sarabi snapped. "He was the one who ruined the Pride Lands. He murdered Mufasa and drove Simba into exile!"

Zira scoffed and curled her lip. "I knew that he killed Mufasa; Scar told me so on the day that he did it," she sneered. "Mufasa was weak compared to Scar, and Simba was too much of a coward to actually stay. Scar was the one who united the lions and hyenas like no king has ever done before. How dare you try to dismantle his legacy?"

Sarafina waited for her to rush, her paws planted firmly on the rock. "If you mean by forcing the lionesses to go hungry while the hyenas steal our food, then yes, he did unite them. He forced them together when a thing like that should never be done."

"And he blamed my mate's death on my son, my innocent son!" Sarabi added ferociously. "How dare you justify everything Scar has done!"

With a ferocious snarl, Zira lunged at the older lioness. Sarabi reared up and caught her, the two lionesses now biting and clawing. Zira swatted towards Sarabi's eyes in an attempt to blind her, but Sarafina was already on the scene. She crunched down on Zira's tail, making Zira roar in pain, before Sarafina launched herself on top of her back, raking at her flanks with her front claws.

As Zira staggered back, ready for more blood, a mew made all three lionesses stop fighting. Nuka, who was only a few months old, looked up at them with scared amber eyes. He looked almost like a younger Scar except with a more innocent look. Sarabi's heart gave out to her nephew, who had to put up with lions like Scar and Zira as parents.

"Come, Nuka! We're leaving!" Zira snapped at her son. "We're obviously not wanted here anymore."

"But Mama, I don't wanna go..." Nuka pleaded, his eyes wide as Zira towered over him. "They were nice to me, and..."

But Zira scratched his ear, making Nuka yelp. "They're trying to overthrow Scar! But you would like to see your father fall, wouldn't you?!" she snarled, and Nuka began to sniffle. "Now quit your crying and let's go!"

As Sarabi watched this, she felt a motherly fury wash over her. Poor Nuka didn't deserve all this; he was just a cub. It was Zira and Scar who had deprived her of raising her own cub, and now it seemed like their cub was doomed to a life of misery with them.

So she stalked forward and gently rested a paw on her nephew's shoulder. "He's not going with you," she retorted. "Nuka's staying with us, where you can't harm him anymore."

"You have no right!" roared Zira, and she was frothing at the mouth. "You can't take my cub from me!"

"No," Nuka mewled. "I wanna stay with them. Don't make me leave."

Zira looked absolutely furious and was ready to pounce on them, to kill them. But her paws already ached from fighting against more experiences to lionesses, and she had no time for arguing. Plus, she reckoned, Nuka would not survive a few months with the Pride Lands lions anyway. Not that she cared about him surviving; she could have other cubs with Scar or another lion, healthier cubs that she would be more proud of.

"Fine. Keep that little termite, you old hags," she finally snarled. "He's no son of mine anyways. And if Scar burns, then may all of you burn with him!"

With one more spiteful glare at Nuka and the others, she limped away to the Outlands. Nuka huddled closer to Sarabi and Sarafina, sniffling, and the lionesses gave each other a firm nod. They would do their best to raise the young sickly cub as part of the pride. So Sarafina picked up Nuka to carry him away from the battle, while Sarabi charged back to help her son fight.

Simba sliced his claws against a hyena's face before leaping away, panting heavily. Before him, the battle had started to turn in favor of his side. The hyenas may have had the numbers, but the spirit of the lionesses and the jungle animals were what kept them from falling to the hyenas' jaws. As Simba saw the hyenas start retreating, he joined the lionesses in chasing them away from Pride Rock, past the flames and fleeing across the Pride Lands.

But Simba had no time to celebrate now, running back towards Pride Rock. He had to find Scar, fast, and finish him off for good. The smoke from the fire was settling in fast over Pride Rock, making visibility hard. If he couldn't find Scar, then the traitorous lion would get away with all his schemes and sins.

Then, when the lightning flashed against the face of the rock, he finally spotted Scar. The older lion was trying to slink away towards the incline that led to the top of Pride Rock, hoping to flee.

With a furious roar, Simba sprung forth. Scar noticed him and took off running, climbing higher and higher up Pride Rock. This almost took Simba back to his cubhood days, when Mufasa had taken Simba up to the top of Pride Rock to show him the kingdom. Now there was another event that was going to take place, which anyone with keen eyes could observe from far away.

Finally, after minutes of running and leaping and climbing, Simba had caught up with Scar. The older lion was at the edge of the top of Pride Rock, where he and Mufasa used to watch the sun rise. Simba leaped through the flames and landed on the other side, where no one would interfere.

"Murderer..." Simba growled, stalking closer and closer to Scar. "It's over, Scar."

"Simba, please...let me explain..." Scar pleaded. "Have mercy on me."

Simba ignored the pleading. "Mercy? After what you did? You don't deserve to live."

Scar backed up a little bit more. "But Simba...I...am...family!" he chuckled nervously. "I-It's the hyenas who are the real enemy! It's those revolting scavengers' fault, it was their idea! I was planning on killing them all anyway."

Unknowingly to them, Shenzi and her main minions (Banzai, Ed, Kamari, and Azizi) followed Simba and Scar up Pride Rock, to defend their ruler from Simba. But when they heard Scar blaming them for all his problems and heard him call them 'revolting scavengers', they backed away, snarling in anger. Scar had promised to not show bigotry towards any hyenas during his reign as king, but he was just as bad as plenty of lions.

"That double-crosser! He's a little rat!" Banzai snapped. "I can't believe we trusted him!"

"I kept saying we shouldn't have trusted him, didn't I?" Kamari snarled, while Azizi and Ed snarled and bared their teeth as well. "He's gonna pay for going back on our deal."

"Oh, we're gonna make him pay," growled Shenzi. "Follow me, boys. Let's let him deal with Simba alone."

So they left the fighting to the two lions. They would be back to pick up whatever scraps were left of either lion. Whichever one lost, it was no skin off their nose if they tore that lion apart.

In the meantime, Simba was backing Scar up against the edge of Pride Rock. Several images flashed in his mind: him and Nala going to the elephant graveyard, him and Scar going to the gorge, the stampede. Those were not by accident. Scar had deliberately set those scenarios up to kill him and Mufasa, and even put Nala in danger.

"Why should I believe you?" he asked furiously, meeting Scar's frightened eyes with his glare. All the respect he had for his uncle was completely gone. "Everything you ever told me was a lie. You tried setting me and Nala up to be killed. You made me believe that I was the one who killed my father when it was you. You've lied to me, to the pride, and even to the hyenas. You've destroyed everything my father tried to uphold, a king better than a son of hell that you are."

"He's a dead king!" Scar snapped back, some of his old defiant fire returning. "He was just an arrogant, pompous, and overrated fool! He was admired by all of his loyal subjects while I rotted in his shadow! But I showed him! I could have anything he had that I couldn't have: loyal subjects, a devoted queen - "

With a roar, Simba ran over and knocked Scar to the ground. There was true terror in his uncle's green eyes, as if he was Mufasa coming back to life to judge him.

"You think that because you killed my father, you're better than him?" Simba snarled, his claws itching to swipe at Scar. "All the time since you revealed your crimes, I've wondered what kind of lion would do such a thing. There's nothing

inside you, Scar, nothing at all. You're pathetic, you're sad, you're weak...and above all, you're nothing but a coward."

"What are you going to do?" pleaded Scar as his nephew towered over him. "You wouldn't kill your own uncle!"

Simba stared coldly down at Scar. His uncle really had to play that card, even after he had murdered Mufasa to get what he wanted. He really did feel like tearing the older lion's throat out, to see his life bleed out on the rock. He even wanted to walk over to Scar and push him over the edge of Pride Rock, to see him die from the fall, just as he had done to Mufasa years ago. All in all, he just wanted Scar gone.

But something held him back: mercy. Simba knew that downright killing Scar would not bring his father back, nor would it grant him any peace. He would be no better than his uncle if he decided to kill him especially if he were to push him just as his uncle had done to Mufasa. Just seeing Scar pay for his crimes once and for all would bring him peace.

"No, Scar," he finally declared, stepping away from Scar. "I'm not like you. As much as I hate you, I can't do it. I won't kill you. So I'll let you live."

"Oh Simba, thank you," Scar exclaimed, sounding relieved as he stood up. "You are truly noble. I'll make it up to you, I promise. Now how can I prove myself to you? Tell me anything. Tell me what you want me to do."

Simba paused, recalling when Scar had told him to run away from the Pride Lands, to never return. Then, with no hesitation, he growled the same words that Scar told him years ago: "Run. Run away, Scar, and never return."

Scar stood there, shocked and unblinking. For a moment, the two lions stood face-to-face, neither moving. The embers from the raging fire twirled around them like burning bits of leaves, and the battle between the lionesses and the hyenas fell deaf to their ears.

"Yes...of course," Scar finally said, slinking around Simba. But then, out of Simba's angry eyesight, he noticed a pile of burning ashes and started walking slowly toward them. "As you wish...your MAJESTY!"

Blinded, however, Simba yelled out in pain and recoiled trying to clear his eyes. As Nala watched Simba, her eyes widened in shock.

“SIMBA!” she cried out, “LOOK OUT!"

Simba regained his bearings as he saw Scar lunge towards him, teeth bared and claws unsheathed. Fortunately, Nala pushed him away and began to grapple with him. Despite being smaller and older than Nala, Scar managed to gain the advantage and pinned her down, preparing to bite her neck until Simba pushed him off. “Get away from my future wife!”

he declared, which made Nala’s heart flutter as she smiled lovingly to him, with Simba returning the smile. Unfortunately, Scar chose that moment to knock him down as he attempted to choke his nephew whilst he smiled maliciously. Nala instantly got back up and swiped her claws at Scar’s face, glaring at the tyrant. “Don’t you dare hurt my future husband!” she roared out. Shaking his head, Scar roared at the two lions with Simba and Nala roaring back as they began biting and clawing at each other to decide the fate of the Pride Lands. Scar pawed them off and they began to circle around each other, waiting for their opponent to make the next move.

“YOU CAN’T WIN SCAR!” Simba and Nala both yelled.

“THIS IS MY KINGDOM!” Scar screamed defiantly at them, “MY DESTINY!”

Scar lunged back with a roar while Simba and Nala did the same as the three lions continued to fight two-on-one. Using teamwork, Simba and Nala were able to lay down some hits on Scar as he attempted to do the same to no avail. Growling, Scar threw some dust up to blind them and knocked them on the ground before he leapt towards them, intent on finishing them off for good.

Scar ended up falling a long way with a roar, tumbling down the side of Pride Rock until he landed with a thud heavy thud. Simba ran over to the edge to see what had happened to his uncle. There, at the bottom of the rock near his old den, was Scar, gravely injured but still alive. The dethroned lion was

staggering as he struggled to get up, limping all the way, just as the hyenas came to greet him. He noticed how they were approaching him, as if he were prey instead of a friend.

"Ah, my friends. So glad to see you!" he greeted them with a grin, limping to them. He was half-blinded now, the scratch from Simba having damaged most of his eye. "It will take some time, but together, we can rebuild our army and retake Pride Rock."

But the hyenas didn't smile or even return the greetings. Shenzi scoffed, "Friends? Oh. Friends! I thought he said we were the enemy!"

"Yeah, that's what I heard," Kamari replied, and Scar's smile instantly turned to horror. "We heard you call us 'revolting scavengers'."

"Yeah! And that you wanted to kill us!" growled Azizi. Next to him, the usually goofy Ed bared his teeth angrily at their former employer.

"No," Scar lied, trying to keep his army under control. He needed to lie to them some more, to regain their support so that they would help him. "Let me explain. I was trying to fool him, to get his guard down! We can rule together!"

But Shenzi stood in his way, blocking off his chance of escape. "Scar, you ain't nothin' but a filthy liar and a

hypocrite," she snarled. "You said you would treat us right, yet you called us scavengers to save your greasy little hide. That's why you fought Simba alone. At least lions and hyenas hate each other naturally, yet you used us not being in the Pride Lands to make us support you. In fact," she added, a sneer in her tone, "you ain't no lion. You're nothin' but a snake."

Scar was backing away from her now, no longer able to escape. His lies had all been used up. He had no more tricks up his sleeve, and the hyenas had seen his true colors at last.

"There's only one true thing you ever said, Scar," Shenzi went on, a sadistic grin on her muzzle as she stood before Scar with the fire around them. "A hyena's belly is never full."

"Yeah, that's what I heard," Banzai repeated what Kamari had said. He, Kamari, Azizi, and Shenzi turned their heads to Ed one more time asking, "ED!?!?"

Ed, usually the stupid one, actually had a cruel smirk on his face. Then he let out a low and frightening giggle, and the hyenas started to creep toward the lion they once called ally. It was Ed's call that ultimately rallied the hyenas into a feeding frenzy.

Scar kept backing away, trying more to justify himself, but it was too late. All of the hyenas launched their attack at once, biting and ripping at Scar with sheer brutality. Scar swatted his claws at several hyenas, briefly earning him reprieve as

he killed one, but he ended up getting pushed back. Then, as if one creature, the hyenas rushed in, knocking Scar down and tearing at his flesh with their fangs. In a few moments, Scar was dead - done in by his own army - and the hyenas were now filling their bellies.

Simba had watched them all with wide eyes. He knew hyenas weren't the smartest animals from Africa but in North America, and they certainly knew how to hold a grudge. Once they had started to kill Scar, Simba turned away to go back to the lionesses, his late uncle's screams rattling his ears. In the end, Scar ended up paying for his wrongdoing, with a lesson he would never forget.

Watching Scar's death was Strom, a griffon vulture. Strom had no choice but to follow his sidekick Zira and her cub Kovu to the Outlands.

At last, as Simba climbed his way down Pride Rock, the rains had finally come to the Pride Lands. The heavy downpour put out the fire ravaging Pride Rock, leaving behind blackened logs and shriveled bushes. When Simba made it down, he couldn't help but open his mouth to catch the raindrops on his tongue. It tasted of salvation, of faith and hope, of a blessing finally replacing a curse. Scar's terrible reign had finally come to an end.

Simba smiled at those who had come by after the battle. Zazu was perched on a rock as he passed, bowing low and murmuring, "Your Majesty." He was approached and nodded to by several lionesses, even getting to meet his new cousin:

Scar's son Nuka, who stared up in awe at the lion that defeated his evil father. After gently nuzzling the timid little cub, he counted how many had survived the battle, and how many were in the hotel. He was excited to hear the announcement of one of the Guinea fowl and one of the three antelope - returning to the hotel after the fight - but he would make sure that they were honored. The girls, polar bears, jackals, marabous, vultures, and the black cockerel led by Iris and her pet penguin returned to the pride.

Nala and Sarabi approached Simba with looks of pride and joy on their muzzles. Simba padded over to his mother, sharing a nuzzle with her, before looking at Nala. He really couldn't have done this without her. There was a lot to say to her that he wanted to say, to thank her for helping him, to say that he loved her. Instead, he padded to her and nuzzled her, which she happily returned. Sarabi watched them with joy, happy indeed to see her son has returned at long last.

Then Timon and Pumbaa approached him, along with their jungle friends and Timon's Ma and Uncle Max. They were a little nervous to be standing beside a huge group of carnivores, but when the lionesses smiled warmly at them, they saw that there was nothing to fear. When Timon and Pumbaa stood before their younger friend, they bowed, as did everyone else.

In return, Simba gave Timon and Pumbaa a hug instead. I couldn't have done it without you guys as well, he thought. Timon and Pumbaa backed up to let him by, the former sharing smiles with his mother and uncle.

A rattling sound dragged their attention to Tamino. The red-crowned peacock was sitting on a nearby rock, pointing with her staff and falconry to the edge of Pride Rock's balcony. Simba knew what that meant. With a nod to his family and friends, he left their side to approach Tamino, who bowed low to him. While he himself did not bow back, Simba hugged her as well, initially surprising the red-crowned peacock before he returned the affection.

Tamino joyfully said, "Now do your best in there!"

Thus, Simba began his ascent up toward the edge of Pride Rock. Below him were the others gazing up in awe: Nala, Sarabi, Zazu, Timon, Pumbaa, Bunga, and all the rest. It felt like he was being born again by rain, his spirit becoming renewed, the more he climbed up and up. Was this how Mufasa felt when he became king of Pride Rock?

When he reached the edge of Pride Rock, he looked back up to the rainy sky. Some of the storm clouds had moved away, revealing stars twinkling on the night sky. Simba felt the cooling wind swirl past him as Mufasa's voice resounded in his ears:

"Remember..."

I will always remember, Dad. Always, Simba thought. He would never forget all who had helped him get here. He

would never forget the wisdom his father and others had taught him over the years. And he would spend the rest of his life upholding the traditions his father and many others had carried out.

Then, lifting his head, Simba let out a roar, a roar that echoed across the land and reached the heavens above. The lionesses answered his roar with their own roars, all the roars louder than the rain. All the animals and girls that couldn't roar watched on with looks of awe or pride.

Simba smiled as he gazed out over the kingdom that he was to rule before roaring again. It was indeed time. He was now king of the Pride Lands at last.

Months passed, and slowly but very surely, the Pride Lands were finally restored to their former glory. Where there had been dry dirt and empty watering holes, there was now plenty of greenery and water; the rains had come and gone, revitalizing the land. There were no remnants of Scar's tyrannical rule left, and everyone couldn't have been happier. The word George’s Wild Animal Kingdom has been turned into Serena’s Wild Animal Kingdom on the entrance sign. Indeed, the herds and other animals had heard of King Simba's triumphant victory over Scar and had returned home, celebrating and rejoicing in having come back.

The black cockerel appeared as a trumpeter when Simba was the rightful king.

The fourteen dolphins have returned to their pool and joined the sea lions for the first time in Serena’s Wild Animal Kingdom.

The grizzly bears, wolves, secretary birds, otters, deer, foxes, badgers, frogs, macaws, parrots, leopards, and every worldwide animal had remained untouched in the exhibits.

At Pride Rock, a special event was taking place. King Simba himself looked down with joy at the animals in his kingdom, watching them gather one by one. Antelope and zebras joined as one herd, elephants trumpeted, cheetahs are watching in happiness, giraffes stood tall, and monkeys hooted and hollered from the larger animals. He even saw some of his jungle friends from the hotel, having moved from the jungle to the Pride Lands and residing behind the lionesses of their own. Timon's colony - led by his mother and uncle - was also invited to stay in the Pride Lands as they wished, where they never had to worry about hyenas again. Speaking of hyenas, Simba had come to realize that not all hyenas were like Shenzi's clan, and any hyena willing to respect the Circle of Life was more than welcome to visit the Pride Lands.

He headed back into the cave and saw Queen Nala sitting near the entrance, laying down and smiling. Nestled in the nook of her forelegs were two cubs - a female and a male, born a week ago and hours apart - with Timon, Pumbaa, and Bunga standing guard. The girls and jungle animals watch the animals in excitement. Simba smiled down at his mate and cubs, whom they had named Kiara and Kion. He had been

excited to be a father, especially when he thought of them playing with Nuka. Nuka looked like Scar, but Simba knew to judge him by his character, and that character was completely opposite of Scar's. While his father was traitorous and bitter, Nuka was friendly and eager to be with others, shown when he happily met Kiara and Kion on the day of their birth.

The unmistakable tap of Tamino's staff on the cave wall turned their heads. Tamino herself hobbled into the cave, gazing down at the two cubs with joy; it was the day that she was to present both Kiara and Kion to the kingdom and the world. She plucked a fruit off of the end of her staff, broke it into two, and gently smeared the juice onto each of the cubs' foreheads.

"Hey, Tamino," Simba rumbled, sharing a hug with the teenage red-crowned peacock. "I'm glad you came."

"Of course, I came. It is time," replied Tamino, chuckling. "Are you ready, my friend?"

Simba nodded. "I'm always ready. Ready until the day I survive."

Tamino bowed low before turning her attention to the two cubs cuddling with Nala. She gently picked Kiara up, heading to the entrance of the cave. Sarabi padded over and gently picked Kion up, bringing her grandson to where Nuka was practicing pouncing on a beetle; they would stay inside after

presenting Kiara to the kingdom to also introduce Kion. Bunga walked over and placed himself at the cave entrance, as if ready to fight off any intruder that would invade his new home.

As for Tamino, Simba and Nala followed her as she stood at the edge of Pride Rock, waiting for them. Timon and Pumbaa followed them out, watching the birds flying around the king and queen in celebration, as Timon cheered and posed. When they got to the edge of Pride Rock (after greeting Zazu, who had arrived and bowed low to them), Simba and Nala shared a loving nuzzle before letting Tamino come between them, carrying Kiara in her arms and lifting her up into the air. The animals below them cheered, bellowed, roared, and trumpeted in greetings, welcoming the new and rather confused cub into the world. The girls, polar bears, marabous, jackals, vultures, the galago, the antelope, Iris's pet penguin, the aardvark, the guineafowl, the bongo, and the bat-eared fox watched the new beginning of Kiara's presentation.

Simba watched with fatherly pride welling up in his heart as his daughter received this welcome. Kiara was sure to be a great queen one day, and he would help her follow in the same pawprints that Mufasa had set out for him. As for Kion, he could become the head of the Lion Guard, to help protect the Pride Lands and the animals within. No matter what path his cubs would take, he would be there for them. He would also be there for Nala, Sarabi, Timon, Pumbaa, Nuka, and all the others he would love and protect for all time. And he promised, with all his heart, to respect and remember the lessons he had learned on the way.